POLTERGEIST SPECIAL

THE BIRTH OF THE POLTERGEIST MARTIN LUTHER'S KNOCKING SPIRITS

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www.forteantimes.com
PUBLISHED BY
DENNIS PUBLISHING,
30 Cleveland Street
London W1T 4JD, UK Tel: 020 7907 6000
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PAUL RAYNER: 020 7907 6663
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PRINTED BY BENHAM GOODHEAD PRINT LTD
DISTRIBUTION
Distributed in UK, Ireland and worldwide
by Seymour Distribution Ltd.
2 East Poultry Avenue, London EC1A 9PT
Tel: 020 7429 4000 / Fax: 020 7429 4001
Queries on overseas availability should be emailed to info@seymour.co.uk
Speciality store distribution by Worldwide Magazine Distribution Ltd, Tel: 0121 788 3112 Fax: 0121 7881272
STANDARD SUBSCRIPTION RATES
12 issues: UK £39.98; EU £47.50;
REST OF THE WORLD £55; US $79.99 ($143.98 for 24 issues)
Fortean Times (USPS 023-226) is published every four weeks by Dennis Publishing Ltd, 30 Cleveland Street, London, W1P 4JD, United Kingdom.
The 2008 US annual subscription price is $79.99.
Airfreight and mailing in the USA is by Agent named Air Business, C/O Worldnet Shipping USA Inc., 149-35 177th Street, Jamaica, New York, 11434.
Periodical postage paid at Jamaica, NY 11431, USA.
US Postmaster: Send address changes to: Fortean Times, 3330 Pacific Avenue, Suite 404, Virginia Beach, VA, 23451-2983, USA.
DENNIS PUBLISHING LIMITED
GROUP FINANCE DIRECTOR IAN LEGGETT
FINANCE DIRECTOR BRETT REYNOLDS
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR KERIN O'CONNOR
CHIEF EXECUTIVE JAMES TYE
CHAIRMAN FELIX DENNIS
ABC Member of the Audit Bureau of Circulations.
Printed in the UK. ISSN: 0308 5899
© Fortean Times: SEPTEMBER 2012

editorial

Poltergeist!

A thoroughly modern spirit

There's no shortage of recent horror movies claiming to derive from 'real-life events', and the words 'based on a true story' have become a modern genre commonplace. So it's nice to report that one new British film, from director Pat Holden, definitely has its origins in reality – indeed, in his own strange family history. *When the Lights Went Out* is a retelling of the sequence of bizarre and often terrifying events that took place in the house of his aunt and of which his own mother was a frequent witness. 30 East Drive, on the Chequerboard estate in the Yorkshire town of Pontefract, was the distinctly average setting for one of the most unusual – and unusually violent – poltergeist outbreaks on record.

In this special polt-themed issue, we look at the 'real-life events' behind the film, as Alan Murdie examines the original case and the poltergeist that became known as 'The Black Monk of Pontefract', and we talk to Pat Holden and producer Bil Bungay about *When the Lights Go Out*, and the way in which one family's struggle against a supernatural threat became a metaphor for contemporary Britain.

"My daughter seems to be the focus of the activity – shall I fetch her down?"

MARTIN ROSS

Sticking with noisy spirits, Claude Lecouteux examines how the term 'poltergeist' emerged from various 16th-century beliefs, SD Tucker looks at the way the notion of 'possession' has been applied to terrible human crimes, and David Hambling turns a scientific eye on one possible explanation of poltergeist phenomena – RSPK, or Recurrent Spontaneous Psychokinesis. And, as Alan Murdie reveals, even Charles Fort, the explorer of anomalies after whom this august journal is named, although more used to combing through newspaper reports of high strangeness than dealing with the real thing, had a run-in with an apparent poltergeist during his sojourn in London.

James story unearthed

Just after our last issue, with its M R James cover story, went to press, news reached us from the *East Anglian Daily Times* (8 Aug 2012) of the discovery of a previously unpublished story by the master himself (although some sources seem to suggest that its existence has been known of for some time). James scholar Rosemary Pardoe unearthed the handwritten manuscript in the archives of King's College, Cambridge, where James was provost for some years. The story – "The Game of Bear" – is unfinished, but a competition organised by Suffolk Coast and to be judged by *The Woman in Black* author Susan Hill offers children the chance to complete it: http://bit.ly/MxmiWw (thesuffolkcoast.co.uk).

A warning to the curious...

On a related topic, we must confess to a major 'hiccup' in last issue's competition to win copies of a new collection of James's ghost stories from Quercus Books. First off, we forgot to provide an email or postal address for entries. And from there, things went quickly downhill. A number of readers spotted the (ahem) deliberate error, which meant that none of the given answers for the question "Which James story takes place in the East Coast town of Seaburgh?" was correct.

Some thought that we were trying to make our competitions harder, or more fortean; reader Aislinn Clarke provided the most painfully detailed correction:

The answer to the question "Which James story is set in the East Coast town of Seaburgh" is none of the three offered answers. The correct answer is: "A Warning to the Curious".

None of the offered answers are set in Seaburgh, MR James's fictional version of Aldeburgh in Suffolk. Of the three offered possible answers, "Oh, Whistle" is the only one set by the seaside at all, but it is set in Burnstow, a fictionalised version of Felixstowe, Suffolk. It is not set in Seaburgh or Aldeburgh. The other two are not even set by the sea at all. "The Diary of Mr Poynter" is set in London and in Rendcomb Manor, Warwickshire. "The Ash Tree" is set in Castringham, which is a fictionalised version of James's childhood village of Great Livermere. That is also in Suffolk but considerably more inland than Seaburgh/Aldeburgh. It is not a seaside village.

"A Warning to the Curious" is set in Seaburgh.

Surprisingly, perhaps, a number of correct entries reached us, and the winners will be receiving their books shortly.

DAVID SUTTON

BOB RICKARD

PAUL SIEVEKING

Why fortean?
Everything you always wanted to know about *Fortean Times* but were too paranoid to ask!
SEE PAGE 78

A DEMON OF VENGEANCE UNLEASHES A TORRENT OF CRIMSON HELL!

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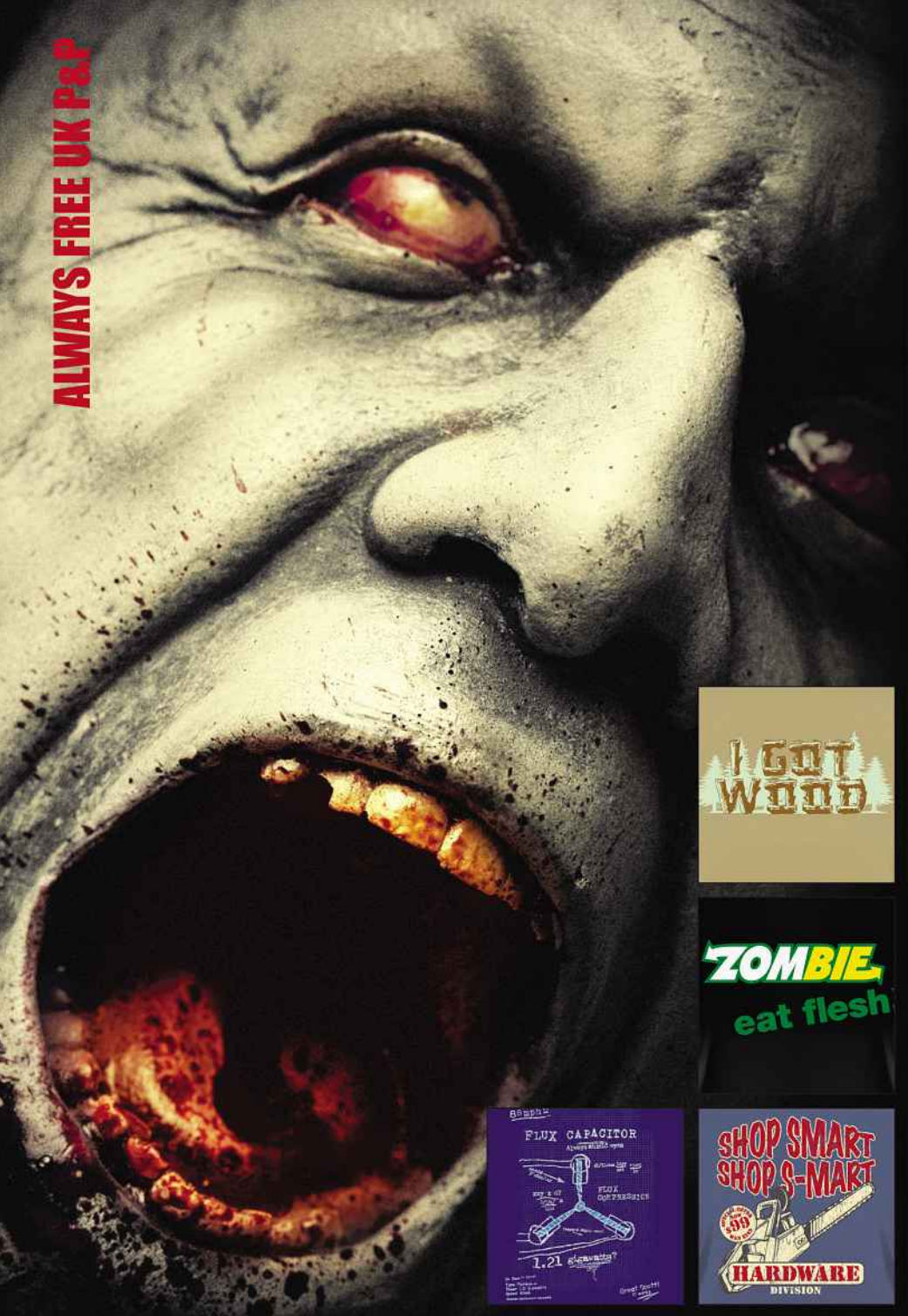

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MOVIE TEES WITH BITE!

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strangedays

The great Essex lion flap

Clacton caravanners spot what they claim is a lioness, plus Romford van driver sees a maned male

EAST NEWS PRESS AGENCY LTD

PA PHOTOS

CAT PEOPLE: The mysterious animal spotted on Earls Hall Farm in St Osyth, and Stephen and Gill Atkin, who were dining when asked to confirm the sighting to the police.

Just before 7pm on Sunday, 26 August, two couples spending the Bank Holiday weekend in caravans on Brenda Lord's Earls Hall Farm in St Osyth, about 5 miles (8km) west of Clacton in Essex, saw and photographed what they took to be a lioness in an adjacent field, and informed the police. About 30 officers, including a firearms team and two police helicopters with thermal imaging equipment, were called to the scene, and residents were warned to stay indoors or, if they had to go outside, to be "extra vigilant and cautious". All the big cats from Colchester Zoo were accounted for, but 'experts' there allegedly pronounced the reports genuine after being shown the photographs. Zoo staff accompanied the search, armed with tranquilliser guns.

Bernadette Cleere of the King's Arms pub in St Osyth said that speculation was rife among regulars (as no doubt it was in the aptly named Red Lion pub nearby). "There was a circus in Clacton a couple of weeks ago and so lots of people are wondering whether it may have escaped from there," said Ms Cleere. It later transpired that the Great British Circus – which had been camped on Clacton Airfield and is one of the last in the UK to use wild animals – had no lions, only tigers, all of which were accounted for. According to the register required under the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1974, there are 12 privately held lions in the UK, none of which had been reported missing. That just left an illegally owned big cat, spectral felid from another dimension, tulpa (materialised thought-form) – or misidentification of a more conventional British mammal.

"I got the binoculars out... it looked like a lion"

The initial report had come from the caravanning couples: Denise Martin, 52, a warehouse operative from Canvey Island, her husband, Bob, 51, a professional driver, her brother, David Wright, 57, a lorry driver from Dagenham, and his wife, Sue, 58. Mrs Martin was the first to spot the animal from her caravan. "I was looking out of the window and we saw smoke from a bonfire," she said. "When the smoke cleared I could see this shape in the field, so I got the binoculars out... it looked like a lion." She said it was tan-coloured with a white chest, adding: "One time it sat up and looked at us and we could see its ears twitching. It knew we were there and it sat down and started cleaning itself." Sue Wright added that the couples had watched the lion for about half an hour before it wandered off. She said: "The moment I saw it, straight away I said 'That looks like a lioness'." The Wrights were able to capture some images of the animal on a digital camera from about 200 yards (180m) away. Roger Lord, co-owner of the caravan site, observed the animal through binoculars.

Also at the caravan site were Stephen and Gill Atkin from Louth in Lincolnshire. "We were having an evening meal and there was a knock on the window," said

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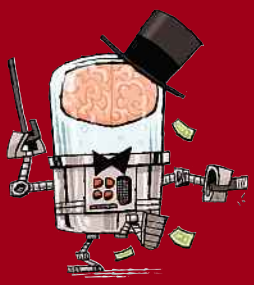

FOREVER PEOPLE
Brain download plus academic study of immortality
PAGE 8

URINE TROUBLE
Peeing on co-workers' chairs and other odd compulsions
PAGE 11

GHANAIAN GRAB-BAG
A crab baby, miracle births, mermaids, plus a disappearance
PAGE 20

Mr Atkin, 52. "The man looked concerned and we thought that someone had been taken ill… He had a phone with him and said, 'Can you confirm to the police what I am seeing?' He handed me the telephone, I went outside and confirmed, 'Yes, it is a very large animal, possibly a lion but a very large cat.' I watched it for about 20 minutes. It was rolling about in the field, cleaning itself, and then it walked for about 20 yards down a hedgerow… It definitely looked like a female lion or a tiger. It was big, about the length of two sheep." Mrs Atkin (who took some photographs of the beast) disagreed with her husband. "Everyone said, 'It's a lion,' but I knew it wasn't a lion as its ears were too pointy. It was more sphinx-like." (*FT* assumes this is a misprint for 'lynx' – although a sphinx loose in Essex would make a better story.)

Another report came from Rich Baker, a van driver from Romford, who was out walking with his two sons. "A man started running towards us yelling 'It's a f— lion!' He looked so panicked you knew it was not a joke. You could see the lion from the side… It was one million per cent a lion. It was a tan colour with a big mane. It was fully-grown. It was definitely a lion. It was just standing there, it seemed to be enjoying itself. There were a dozen or so people who saw it." Who all these other supposed witnesses are is unknown; but the full-maned creature he describes is clearly not the lioness seen by the Martins and Wrights.

Rob Hull, a barman, had already heard about the lion via Facebook and Twitter when he saw what he assumed was the beast in question "ambling laconically along by the lake in the field, like it didn't have a care in the world." And Che Kevin was sitting with his wife "in the front room playing backgammon at around 10pm" when he heard a "very loud roar. It was incredibly odd to hear something like that at that time of night… It sounded like a lion. It was worrying as we had just been for a walk with the dog. We saw the police helicopter but thought it was just searching for a person."

The search was called off shortly before 3pm the following day (27 August). The police announced: "What was seen on Sunday evening was either a large domestic cat or a wildcat. Extensive searches have been carried out, areas examined and witnesses spoken to; yet nothing has been found to suggest that a lion was in the area." No pawprints, no droppings, no hair, nothing.

Anthony Tropeano, one of the staff at Colchester Zoo who analysed the pictures, later described them as being "of such poor quality it's not possible for us to say one way or the other what it definitely is". His colleague Sarah Forsyth thought it was a large dog, while local resident Ginny Murphy thought it was her Maine Coon cat, called 'Teddy Bear'. Thus another alleged lion loose in the British countryside disappears back into the woodwork.

On 6 November 2011, there was a lion sighting near Shepley station in West Yorkshire. Passengers were forced to remain on board a train for two hours close to the station after the police received a call from a woman saying she had spotted a lion as she was driving through Shepley, near Huddersfield. Another witness also rang the police. A two-hour search involving a police helicopter and 12 officers drew a blank [**FT285:8**]. *[PA] Guardian, MSN, East Anglian Daily Times, http://heresycorner.blogspot.com, 27 Aug; D.Telegraph, D.Mail, 28 Aug 2012. For other UK lion sightings, see* **FT252:24**.

EXTRA! EXTRA!

FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Deep cover for the fish that witnessed £4.5m drugs bust

Hull Daily Mail, 17 Mar 2012.

German giant to buy golf course in Kingdom

Irish Independent, 25 Feb 2012.

Insects set to take over county for national event

Yorkshire Eve. Post, 4 Jan 2012.

Patient moved hospital after being set on fire

Hull Daily Mail, 2 Mar 2012.

MAN HELD OVER SADDAM BUTTOCK

Liverpool Echo, 20 Jan 2012.

Court to decide fate of Galaxy

Weekend Australian Financial Review, --Dec (?) 2011.

Vicar loses action against God

Wolverhampton Express & Star, 21 Feb 2012.

Mobile tumours rejected

(Sydney) D.Telegraph, 8 May 2012.

Surge in vanity drugs pushes busts to new high

Sydney Morning Herald, 18 May 2012.

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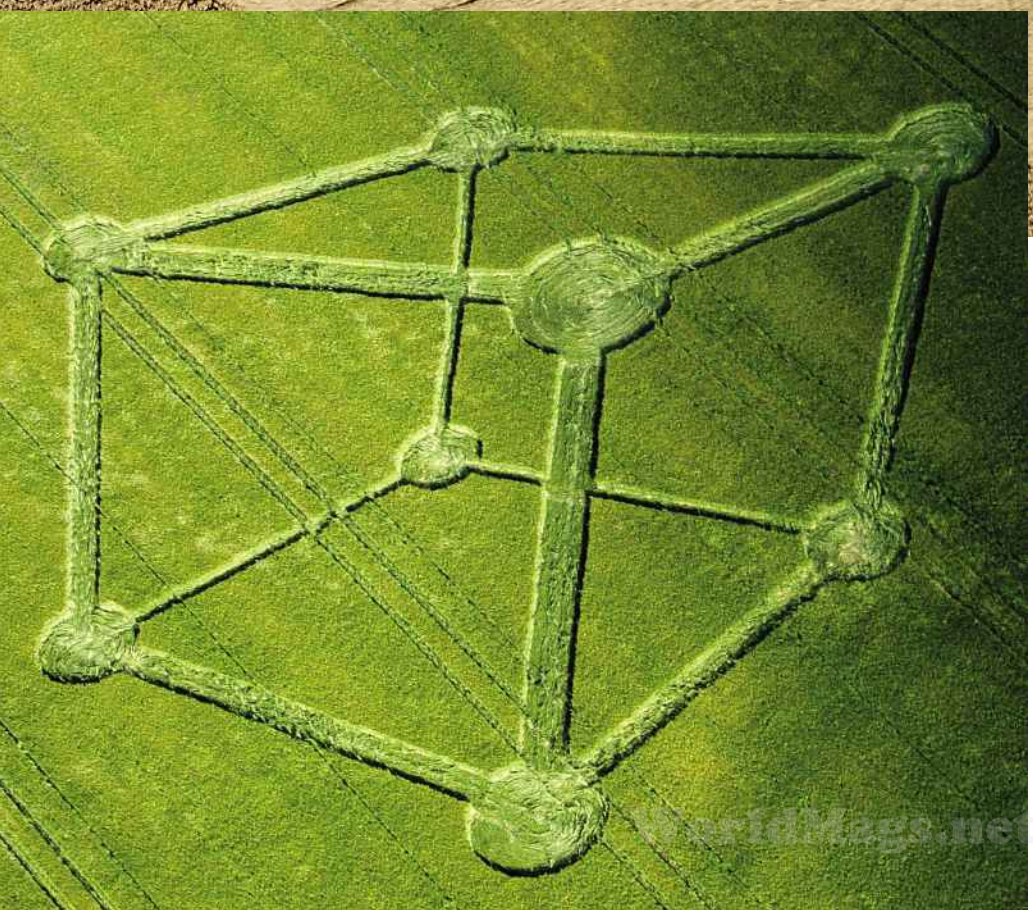

LATEST CROP GLYPHS

The 'endless knot' glyph (above), which appeared at Cheesefoot Head, Winchester, Hampshire, is one highlight of this year's cereological season. The 3D cube design at left appeared on Chilcomb Down, near Winchester, Hampshire. The figure shown opposite, top, is said to depict the recent Transit of Venus across the Sun's disc, and was found on Woodborough Hill, Alton Barnes. A hexagram consisting of 85 circles (facing page, bottom) in a wheat field in the village of Wappenbury, near Coventry in the West Midlands, appeared in the early hours of 19 August It is thought to represent a lunar calendar. *Metro, 14+20 Aug 2012*.

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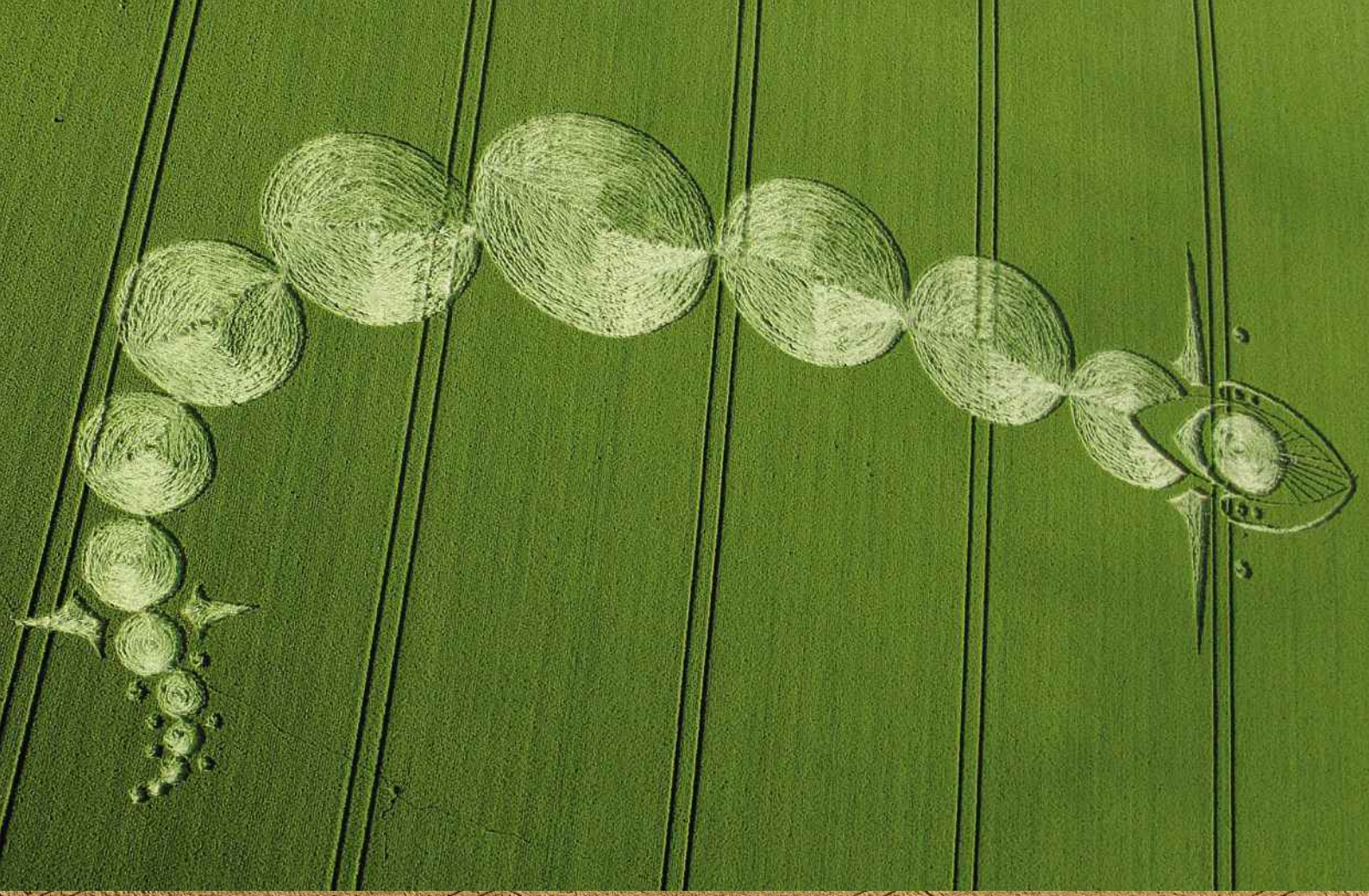


SIDELINES...

TOUCH WOOD (1)

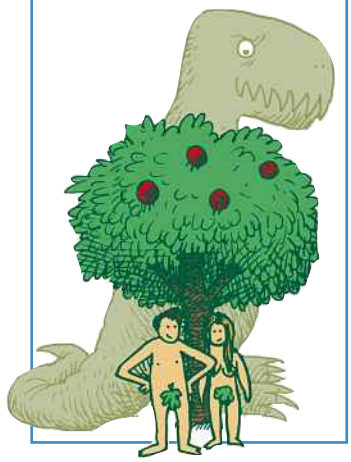
Thousands of Cambodians visited a 'magic' 42ft (13m)-long log dug up from a pond in Prey Yeang village, Pursat province, in July. They offered pig heads and boiled chickens after some locals who touched the log won money on the lottery. Some rubbed talcum powder on the wood, hoping to see lucky lottery numbers, while others smeared pond mud on their bodies to cure their ailments. *[AFP] 26 July 2012*.

TOUCH WOOD (2)

Druids have found two 'miracle' tree trunks they claim can cure all kinds of pain. Hundreds of believers have sought relief from the beech trees in the Serbian village of Kostunici. "It is well known that some parts of the world have magical powers," announced Druid Zoran Ratkovic. *Metro, 14 June 2012*.

NESSIE VERSUS DARWIN

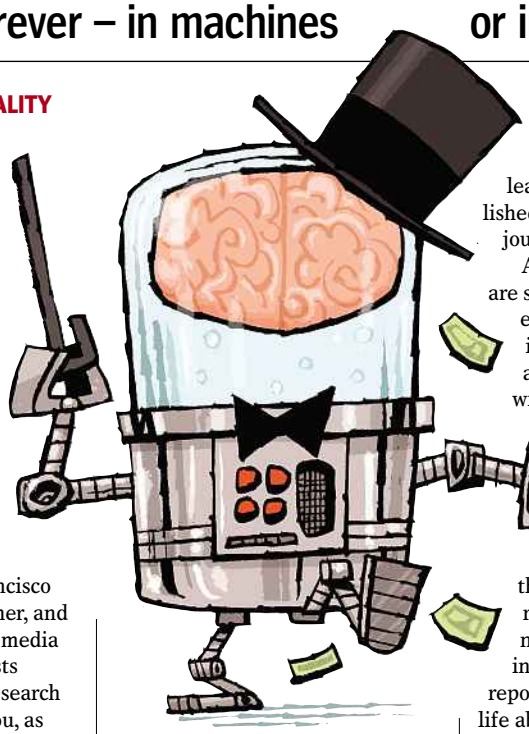
Privately-run fundamentalist schools in Louisiana, USA, such as the Eternity Christian Academy in Westlake, are due to receive state funding. They use textbooks by the Accelerated Christian Education (ACE) program, a creationist outfit. *Biology 1099*, an ACE textbook, claims Nessie is real and "appears to be a plesiosaur". If dinosaurs walked the Earth as the same time as man, ACE argues, then Darwinism is fatally flawed. *Glasgow Herald, 24 June 2012*.



MARTIN ROSS

The eternal question

Can we live forever – in machines or in our bodies?



JONATHAN EDWARDS

CYBERNETIC IMMORTALITY

Dmitry Itskov, a 31-year-old Russian entrepreneur who heads a hi-tech research project named 'Avatar' (after the James Cameron movie), has contacted billionaires listed in *Forbes* magazine to offer them immortality – which he refers to as 'cybernetic immortality' and the 'artificial body' – for an undisclosed sum. He claims to have hired 30 scientists, and aims to 'upload' a human brain into a robot body within 10 years. A San Francisco office is opening this summer, and Avatar will launch a social media project connecting scientists around the world. "Such research has the potential to free you, as well as the majority of all people on our planet, from disease, old age and even death," says Itskov's official website. His final goal, he says, is to upload human minds into holographic bodies. *D.Mail, 18 July 2012*.

THE FOREVER PROJECT

The John Templeton Foundation has laid out $5 million for a three-year study of "the science, philosophy, and theology of immortality" by the philosopher John Martin Fischer. The Foundation was established in 1987 by the late Sir John Templeton, billionaire businessman and philanthropist, in order to explore the "big questions" of human existence. In practice, that means attempting to find common ground between science and religion, or to put it another way, blurring the distinction between them: the Foundation has been accused by a number of high-profile atheist scientists and philosophers of promoting the idea that science and religion provide equally valid ways of understanding the world.

Based at the University of California, Riverside, Fischer's *Immortality Project* will

He aims to 'upload' a brain into a robot body

scrutinise such varied issues as, for example, whether we might achieve immortality by not dying, or by perpetuating consciousness using technology; failing that, whether our personalities might survive bodily death anyway; what causes belief in an afterlife, and whether there is a neurological basis; why there are cultural variations; and the extent to which future anticipation of life after death affects present behaviour.

Half the money will be spent on a range of interdisciplinary research sub-projects, for which proposals will be invited. There will be a couple of conferences, essay competitions, translations of key texts for German-language scholars, all culminating with a book by Fischer. The aim is to attract "eminent scientists, philosophers and theologians whose work will be reviewed by respected leaders in their fields and published in academic and popular journals".

As is to be expected, sceptics are so far unimpressed by the enterprise, but more surprisingly the *Immortality Project* award has not been greeted with unalloyed pleasure by the psychical research community either, despite the huge sums involved. In particular, the claim in the UCR press release (which Fischer has not repudiated in subsequent interviews) that "anecdotal reports of glimpses of an afterlife abound, but there has been no comprehensive and rigorous scientific study of global reports about near-death and other experiences" has been greeted with cries of disbelief, and questioning of Fischer's knowledge of the field.

The disquiet is because the UCR statement is hardly fair to those who have long examined such questions, with far fewer resources than Fischer's lavish funding, and it ignores the extensive body of research published in peer-reviewed journals during the last century. Still, it's early days, and the details on the project website are sketchy at present. Perhaps once the research proposals start coming in, Professor Fischer, whose academic background is mostly in Ethics, will appreciate that this isn't quite the virgin soil he might have assumed when filling out the application forms for Templeton's money. We'll check back in three years to see if it has been well spent.

Tom Ruffles

LINKS

UCR release:
http://ucrtoday.ucr.edu/7496

Project website:
www.sptimmortalityproject.com/

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A little out of control

Synthetic drugs blamed for extreme 'munchies' attacks

● When a naked Rudy Eugene was shot dead while eating Ronald Poppo's face in Miami on 26 May [**FT290:27**; **291:51**], it was suggested that he was high on a street drug called Cloud-9 or 'bath salts', misleadingly said to mimic the effects of cocaine or cannabis. Toxicology tests on Eugene at two labs failed to find any drug apart from ordinary cannabis, but apparently Cloud-9 (also called 'ivory wave' in some reports) can be made from hundreds of compounds, and toxicologists can only test for about 40. This shows that Cloud-9 is such a vague label as to be meaningless. "This is always a moving target," said Dr Barry Logan, a leading US toxicologist. "As soon as a test exists for something, there are new compounds waiting in the wings. We are always a step behind." This situation can be seen as the inevitable result of the prohibition of traditional recreational drugs. *Orlando (FL) Sentinel, 28 June, 9 July 2012.*

● Police in Panama City, Florida, said that in 2011 they had witnessed two violent incidents supposedly linked to Cloud-9. In one, a woman tried to behead her 71-year-old mother; in the second, a man used his teeth to tear up the back seats of a patrol car. *[CNN] 4 June 2012.*

● In late July, CCTV footage showed a man taking a bite out of a seat on the No. 12 bus as it passed through Torbay in Devon, causing £200 damage. A spokesman for the bus operator Stagecoach said: "This is odd". There's no argument there. *D.Telegraph, 27 July 2012.*

● On 2 June, Brandon De Leon, a 21-year-old homeless man, was arrested for shouting and swearing in a restaurant in North Miami Beach. Slamming his head against the Perspex divider in the police car, he shouted at officers: "I'm going to eat you!" He then growled, gnashed his teeth "like an animal", and tried to bite an officer who was treating his head wounds. He was eventually fitted with a Hannibal Lecter-style mask. On the same day, Carl Jacquneaux, 43, bit a chunk out of the face of his ex-wife's new lover Todd Credeur, 48, when he turned up at her home in Scott, Louisiana. Credeur managed to repel his assailant with wasp spray. Both De Leon and Jacquneaux were said to have been under the influence of Cloud-9.

Another supposed Cloud-9 imbiber was Shane Shuyler, 40, who stripped off and lay naked on a park bench in North Miami before chasing a three-year-old girl, shouting: "Come here pretty girl, I wanna stick it in you!" *D.Star, 8 June; Sun, 8+24 June; dailymail.co.uk, 14 June 2012.*

● On 20 June, Charles Baker, 26, visited his girlfriend's home in Palmetto, Florida, to see his children. Evidently intoxicated, he barged in, began yelling and took off his clothes. He continued to scream and began throwing the furniture around. Jeffrey Blake, 48, the children's grandfather, attempted to restrain Baker, who bit a chunk of flesh from Blake's bicep. Blake was able to pin Baker to the ground until two police officers arrived. The frenzied man was only pacified after repeated shots from a stun gun. It was suggested that he had taken Cloud-9. *[WFTS] 21 June; MX News (Sydney), 22 June 2012.*

● On 14 June, Michael Terron Daniel, 22, allegedly smoked a synthetic drug called K-2 or 'spice' at his home in Waco, Texas. He assaulted his housemates, ran out into the yard and began crawling around on his hands and knees. He barked and growled at a neighbour and chased him back into his house. He then took a housemate's dog, a medium-sized spaniel mix, out onto the porch, where he beat and strangled it before ripping "hunks of flesh" from the animal with his teeth and eating them. The housemates called the police. Officers arrived at the house to find Daniel sitting on the porch with "blood and fur around his mouth", the dead dog in his lap. He initially appeared catatonic, but then asked the police for a Taser hit to help end his "bad trip". They refused. Daniel was later charged with cruelty to a non-livestock animal. The effects of 'spice' are said to mimic those of cannabis, a notion that is self-evidently ridiculous. *ABC News Radio, 28 June 2012.*

NEW DIET SCHEMES: A bus seat-eater in Devon (above left) and a Texas dog-devourer.

He asked the police for a Taser hit to end his bad trip

SIDELINES...

MARKING THE MASSACRE

On 4 June 2012, the 23rd anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre in Beijing, the Shanghai stock exchange reported an opening figure of 2346.98 and fell by 64.89 during the day. As both figures included combinations of the forbidden digits marking the date (6/4/1989 in US date style), this news item was rapidly suppressed. *Economist, 9 June 2012.*

BEYOND SATIRE

In July, it emerged that the Chinese characters for "the truth" were blocked on Sina Weibo, China's leading social media website, which has nearly 300 million users. It was not known how long the term had been blocked or why, but one user said he had first noticed it was missing in late June. *D.Telegraph, 13 July 2012.*

NOW YOU SEE IT...

A Swiss farmer rang the police when his tractor disappeared overnight – but he'd unwittingly sent it plunging into Lake Zug in Immensee after leaving the handbrake off. *Metro, 26 June 2012.*

SNAP!

Twins Kelsey and Danielle Taylor, aged 10, of Houghton Regis, Bedfordshire, broke the same bone in their left arms at the same time of day (5.15pm), exactly a week apart. Danielle landed on her forearm playing football on 17 May and then Kelsey fell off her bike on 24 May. They were treated at Luton and Dunstable Hospital. *D.Express, Metro, 8 June 2012.*

MARTIN ROSS

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SIDELINES...

FIGHTING BACK

An elephant hit by a stone thrown by a yob picked it up in its trunk and chucked it back – knocking out a woman visitor at a zoo in Wuhan, China. *Sun, 3 May 2012*. For a photo of an elephant throwing a rock at a tourist car, see **FT176:30**.

LONG SLOW BURN

A neon lamp switched on during the Great Depression and left burning for 77 years was discovered behind a partition at Clifton's Cafeteria on Broadway and 7th Street in Los Angeles. It was installed in 1935 and back-lit a woodland scene in a basement toilet's alcove, which was covered over with plywood in 1949. The lamp is estimated to have racked up more than $17,000 in electricity bills. No similar lamp has lasted more than 40 years. *LA Times, 26 May 2012*.

SAND BEACHED

A road was shut for seven hours after a lorry overturned and spilt three tons of sand at Sandwell in the West Midlands. *Sun, 29 June 2012*.

AVIAN MENACE

Kate Hillman, 32, was walking Vinnie, her pet Pomeranian, on Widbrook Common near her home in Maidenhead, Berkshire, when a red kite swooped down and tried to seize the 4lb 8oz (2kg) dog. "It was huge," she said, "about five times bigger than little Vinnie." She chased it off, but it repeatedly attacked as she fled to her car 300 yards (270m) away, holding Vinnie in her arms. When she returned two days later, the bird attacked again. *D.Telegraph, D.Mail, 27 April 2012*.

MARTIN ROSS

ODD COMPULSIONS

ANOTHER ROUND-UP OF PEOPLE'S UNCONTROLLABLE SEXUAL URGES

OBSESSIVE BEHAVIOUR: Gemma Barker (left) and Charles Marshall (below).

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● "You have got to help me," Dieter Schultz, 43, told the police on his mobile. "She is trying to kill me with sex. I can't get out and I can't go on!" The naked and exhausted German had taken refuge on an apartment house balcony in Munich when his insatiable assailant, a woman aged 47, had fallen asleep. They had met in a city bar and agreed to have casual sex at her home. After eight bouts, he had had enough and tried to escape, but she barred the door. When police entered the apartment, she invited two officers to join her for a "quickie", but they declined.

That was in April. A month later, the woman struck again, keeping her victim on the go for 36 hours. Police found the 31-year-old African man weeping on the street outside her apartment. He too had escaped when she fell asleep. "I met her on a bus," he told police officers. "She invited me back here. Oh God, it was hell. I can't walk. Please help me." The woman was taken to hospital for psychiatric observation. *(Queensland) Courier-Mail, 14–15 April; D.Mail, D.Express, 1 May 2012.*

● A woman who disguised herself so convincingly as a boy that she was able to trick two girls into dating her, was jailed for 30 months at Guildford Crown Court on 5 March. Gemma Barker, 19 at the time, committed repeated sexual assaults on her victims, aged 15 and 16. Barker, now 20, of Staines, Surrey, had introduced herself to the girls using three fake Facebook profiles, and wore hats and baggy clothes to conceal her gender. Her disguises were so convincing that they fooled not only the victims, but their families, and friends who also knew Barker as Gemma – and even police officers. Her barrister, Chetna Patel, said her client suffered from autism and ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder), "struggles to understand the motives and the intensions of others" and wanted to become "the perfect boy" for each of her friends. *D.Mail, 18 Jan; Metro, D.Telegraph, <i> 6 Mar; Sun, 7 Mar 2012.*

● Charles Marshall, 28, was arrested on 13 June for having sex with a teddy bear in an alley near the Elm Street Health Clinic in Cincinnati, Ohio. It was the fourth time since 2010 that he had been arrested for pleasuring himself in public with a teddy bear, for which he had served short stints in jail and paid small fines. It was unclear whether he had used the same stuffed toy on each occasion. *dailymail.co.uk, 15 June; NY Post, 17 June 2012.*

● A man suspected of randomly slashing women's buttocks in shopping malls was arrested in Peru in January. Johnny D Guillen Pimentel, 40, dubbed "the butt slasher", was accused of cutting the behinds of 13 young women in Virginia between February and July 2011 before he fled to Peru. Police said he distracted his victims, causing them to bend over, and then cut their bottoms with a razor or box cutter. *[AP] 30 July 2011; MX News (Sydney), 16 Jan 2012.*

● Police arrested a man in Iowa after he was caught on video peeing on four of his female co-workers' chairs. Raymond Charles Foley, 59, was charged with second-degree criminal mischief

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after turning himself in on 1 April. Foley, who worked in the IT department of Farm Bureau Financial Services in West Des Moines, Iowa, would scan photos in the company's employee database and "pick out the attractive females", said the police. He would then come into work after hours and pee on their chairs. Employees first started complaining about the stains on their chairs in October 2011, and surveillance cameras were installed in February. *Des Moines (IA) Register, 28 Mar; MX News (Sydney), 4 April 2012.*

MEN MEDIA

ANTISOCIAL: Jessica Wright's hair was chopped unexpectedly (left, below) and Raymond Charles Foley (bottom) peed on co-workers' chairs.

● In April, police in Phoenix, Arizona, were searching for a man caught on CCTV biting a woman's foot at a Target store. The man approached the 23-year-old woman, got down on the ground and bit her right foot. "She was shaking her foot, trying to get him off," said a police officer. The man was unknown to her. She was treated in hospital for puncture wounds and given a tetanus shot and antibiotics after the attacker ran away. *MX News (Sydney), Sun, 5 April 2012.*

● A stocky man with a fetish for sniffing girls' hair was being hunted last February after grabbing a teenage Post Office customer in Bedford. *Sun, 17 Feb 2012.*

● A man was banned from carrying scissors in public after he sneaked up on two unsuspecting women and cut their hair. Darren Dixon, 48, from Salford, was sentenced to a three-year community order and anti-social behaviour order at Manchester Crown Court on 3 April. Jessica Wright, 19 – his first victim – was walking in Fallowfield, Manchester, on 26 September 2011 when she noticed Dixon standing close to her. She crossed the road and quickened her pace when she realised he was following her. She felt her hair being touched and "heard a metallic sound" as something hit the ground. Turning, she saw Dixon picking up a pair of scissors and clumps of her hair. The second victim was shopping in Asda in Trafford exactly a month later (26 October) when she heard a noise at the back of her head and discovered Dixon behind her with some of her hair under his foot. In both incidents, Dixon ran away, but CCTV footage led to his arrest. He was obliged to pay both his victims £500. *D.Mail, D.Telegraph, Sun, 15 Feb; Guardian, 4 April 2012.*

She saw Dixon picking up scissors and clumps of hair

MEN MEDIA

● A 32-year-old woman boarded a bus for Clevedon at Bristol bus station on 27 December 2011. She became aware of a man breathing heavily behind her, felt him touching her hair and, hearing a snip, turned to see some of her hair on his leg. He left the bus before she could seek help, but on 2 January she was waiting for the same bus when she saw the man again. She alerted staff, who called police and he was arrested. Malcolm Dearlove, 69, who cannot speak because his larynx was removed seven years ago when he had cancer, admitted the offence. He was also charged with goosing a 79-year-old woman as she walked to church in Bedminster on New Year's Day. On 20 February, he was given a 10-week suspended sentence and put under curfew for three months. *Bristol Eve. Post, 25 Jan, 21 Feb 2012. For FT's most recent round-up of sexual oddities, see* **FT284:20–21**.

SIDELINES...

WOOF GOES WOOF

A man was left with severe burns after he poured petrol on a lit barbecue. John Woof, 32, was engulfed by an 8ft (2.4m) fireball at his home in Preston. *D.Telegraph, 29 May 2012.*

OUT DEMONS, OUT

At dusk on 9 June, Florida teacher Danielle Harkins, 35, led seven teenagers, all former pupils of hers, to a spot by the pier in St Petersburg, where she lit a small fire. She then told them to cut themselves to cast out demons, and cauterise the wounds to prevent the spirits from returning. Two kids were cut, one sustaining burns after Harkins poured perfume on his wound and lit it. They all chanted and danced round the fire. When word got out, Harkins was arrested on child abuse charges. *NY Daily News, 14 June 2012.*

METEORITE HITS HUT

The Thomassen family was astonished to find a meteorite had crashed through the roof of their allotment garden hut in the middle of Oslo. The rock, weighing 585g (20oz), which split in two, probably detached from a meteorite observed over Norway on 1 March. Anne Mette Sannes, a meteorite enthusiast, identified the object as a breccia (composed of broken fragments of minerals or rock), a rare form of meteorite. *[AFP] 12 Mar 2012.*

PSYCHIC PERV

Spiritualist Karl Lang, 49, who tricked women into stripping naked and performing sex acts to enhance their psychic powers so that they could get in touch with dead relatives, was jailed for two years on 20 July. He was said to have 'brainwashed' the two victims, now aged 26 and 27, from 2005 to 2009, claiming he was the reincarnation of Jesus. Lang, from Newport, South Wales, said he had been speaking to the dead since he was four. *South Wales Argus, 21 July 2012.*

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SIDELINES...

SNAKE SHOCK

Alex Gosbee, 44, from Wincheap in Kent, was cured of her snake phobia after getting into bed and finding a non-venomous 2ft (60cm) Californian king snake under her duvet. "I was terrified," said Mrs Gosbee, "but not now. He's really cute and I'd keep him if it wasn't for the cat being so unhappy." *Kentish Gazette Extra, 12 June 2012*.

BEES ATTACK MONKS

On 23 June, as novice monks were sweeping the grounds of Chedi Luang Woriharn temple in Chiang Mai province, northern Thailand, they were attacked by bees from the temple's hives. Abbot Phra Ratcha Jetiyajarn said 76 monks had been sent to three hospitals. In one hospital, six monks were in comas and 19 in a serious condition. The abbot had no idea why they were attacked. *BBC News, 24 June; Metro, 25 June 2012*.

FOUND HIMSELF MISSING

Steve Carter, 35, adopted aged four, searched missingkids.com and saw a picture of what a baby named Marx Panama Barnes would look like now – and realised it was him. His mother, Charlotte Moriarty, had taken him to a stranger's home in Hawaii when he was six months old. She was admitted to psychiatric hospital, but then vanished. *MX News (Sydney), 17 April 2012*.

PENGUIN RECAPTURED

A Humboldt penguin broke out of Tokyo Sea Life Park by jumping over a rock twice its height and slipping through a gap in a barbed wire fence. It was recaptured on a riverbank more than five miles (8km) away on 24 May, after 82 days of freedom, during which it had repeatedly evaded capture and became world-famous. Penguin 337, as it was known, appeared to have been living quite happily in Tokyo Bay and was in good health. *(Melbourne) Sunday Age, 27 May 2012*.

BLACK FOX KILLED

JOHN MOORE / SNWS.COM

JOHN MOORE / SNWS.COM

A black fox was photographed in Cambridgeshire in June, and what was presumed to be the same unusual creature was knocked down and killed by a car a few days later. Tests on the body of the 18-month-old male showed it was a cross between a silver fox and a Russian raccoon dog, and had two gene mutations never seen before. "Experts" think other crossbreeds may be prowling the countryside, including beasts with red bodies and black legs (why they think this is unexplained). Helen McRobie, 44, lecturer in biomedical science at Anglia Ruskin University, which tested the creature's genetic make-up, thinks it didn't live wild. "One of the first things we noticed was the thickness of the fur," she said. "Because it was behaving so tame before the accident, this led us to believe it had escaped from a fur farm or was an exotic pet." However, the RSPCA said the last fur farm in the UK closed in 1992. *Sun, 24 July 2012*.

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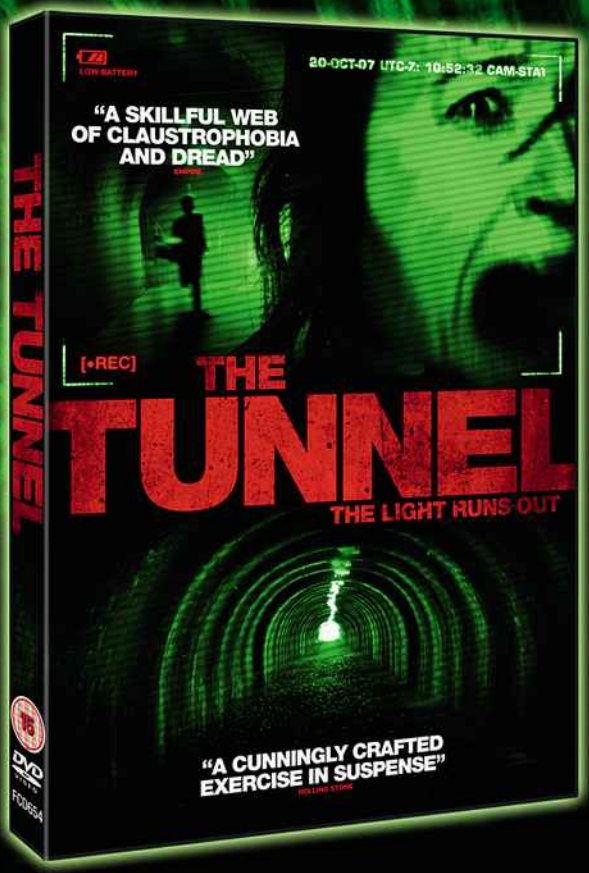

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THE MONSTER MASH!

LATEST PHOTO EVIDENCE FROM LOCH NESS, AN ITALIAN RIVAL TO NESSIE, PLUS AN AMAZONIAN PHALLIC-LOOKING REPTILE

NESSIE PHOTOGRAPHED

A man who has spent 26 years searching for Nessie claims to have taken the best ever picture of what he says is the lake monster. George Edwards, 60, who spends about 60 hours a week taking tourists out on Loch Ness in his boat, *Nessie Hunter IV*, said he took the photograph at 9am on 2 November 2011, using a compact Samsung digital camera that he always keeps on board.

"I was just about to return to Temple Pier [in Drumnadrochit] and I went to the back of the boat, which was facing the pier, and that's when I saw it," he said. "It was slowly moving up the loch towards Urquhart Castle and it was a dark grey colour. It was quite a fair way from the boat, probably about half a mile away, but it's difficult to tell in water." After five to 10 minutes, it slowly sank beneath the surface. For the next half an hour, he tried to locate it with his deep scanning sonar, but without success.

"I have friends in the US who have friends in the military," he said. "They had my photo analysed and they have no doubt that I have photographed an animate object." However, veteran Nessie hunter Steve Feltham was told by a friend that the 'monster' looked a lot like a fake hump he owned, which featured in the 2010 *National Geographic* film, "The Truth Behind the Loch Ness Monster", where you can see it on George Edwards's boat! *telegraph.co.uk, dailymail.co.uk, 3 Aug 2012*. See http://bit.ly/SR1rii (lochnessmystery.blogspot), scroll down to 20 Aug 2012.

For other recent photographs purporting to show Nessie, see **FT150:16, 165:12, 225:6, 273:8, 280:5, 282:12**. For a possible sonar image of the monster, see **FT289:24**.

NESSIE IN ITALY?

"The Loch Ness monster on holiday in Italy?" asked the *Il Resto del Carlino* newspaper on 3 July 2012. Along the river Secchia, which runs 170km (106 miles) from its source in the Apennine Mountains to join the Po near Mantua, people continue to see a monster – especially near Castellarano in Emilia. "Some say it is an alligator, others a giant pink snake. Most sceptics blame the silly season, or talk about a coypu… However, it was seen last year. And, with the arrival of warm weather, people on both banks of the river have begun to talk about it again." This stretch of the river is heavily used by bikers, joggers, bathers and anglers. It seems that everybody has heard of the creature, although not all believe in it.

"I often come here to take chub and carp, but I have never noticed anything strange," an angler said. "A monster? We hope it has a nice body," giggled some girls. A woman said: "When I was young, they used to talk about the Borda, a kind of water witch, which served to keep children away from the canals. But when darkness comes, I am not staying here, because you never know."

The newspaper mentioned no particular sightings other than saying that catfish, alligators, coypu and otters have all been suggested as an explanation, and printing a photo of an ambiguous shape that might just be a branch in the water.

However, the mystery is older, the first reports appearing two years ago. On 10 May 2010, *Il Resto del Carlino* and *L'Informazione* reported that amateur videos allegedly showed "a big snake that emerges from the slime of the river, in the area of Sassuolo, Castellarano and Casalgrande". These videos, by someone calling him/herself

CASCADE NEWS

WATERWORLD: George Edwards's Loch Ness photo. **BELOW:** The 'Trouser Snake'.

It was slowly moving up the loch towards Urquhart Castle

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Barbalizzy, show something that was variously identified as coypu, catfish, or the Loch Ness Monster. They are still available on YouTube.

It is not clear from the various newspaper reports whether – apart from the original videos – anything was ever seen by other witnesses, but as long as the newspapers go on doing annual pieces about these sightings and hinting that new ones will soon come in, we can expect that the Secchia creature will make a splash. "Smiles are mixed with a sudden shiver at the slightest movement of the waters of the river Secchia," as *Il Resto del Carlino* observes.

Ulrich Magin

Videos on YouTube:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=JQHuxY0bZC4
www.youtube.com/watch?v=EEedxAt1trI
Photo, 2012: http://bit.ly/SmnvN8 (ilrestodelcarlino.it).

COCK NESS MONSTER

A blind snake-like creature resembling a human penis has been found in a remote part of the Amazonian rainforest. Biologists found six – each about a metre long, so maybe not *that* much like a human penis – last November on the riverbed of the Madeira river in Rondonia, Brazil, after engineers working for Santo Antonio Energy built a hydroelectric dam. It wasn't until August that they were identified as *Atretochoana eiselti*, a rare creature first spotted in 1968. According to the *Sun* (2 August), "stunned scientists have dubbed the floppy creature 'the Trouser Snake'." Biologist Julian Tupan, who works for Santo Antonio Energy, said: "Of the six we collected, one died, three were released back into the wild and another two were kept for studies. Despite looking like snakes, they aren't reptiles and are more closely related to salamanders and frogs. We think the animal breathes though its skin, and probably feeds on small fish and worms, but there is still nothing proven." *dailymail.co.uk, 1 Aug 2012.*

2012 WATCH

PETER BROOKESMITH SHARES MORE INCOMPREHENSIBLE NEW AGE WISDOM

THE SOULFUL WORLD OF DANIEL SRSA

It's always comforting when someone whose name you can't pronounce says things you don't really understand. Especially when they appear to be trying to communicate in English. It brings back the days when most of the globe was coloured a decent shade of red, Frenchmen were not to be trusted, and no one outside Eton, Rugby or New York had heard of homosexualists. Such a glow of supercilious complacency might come upon an Englishman on reading the pleasantly barking utterances of Daniel Srsa, although that would perhaps not be the most appropriate response.

Mr Srsa is convinced the world will end on 21 December 2012, but he is equally exercised, it seems, about the widespread scepticism that greets such assertions. The trouble is, people will keep using their minds and thinking about things and coming to more or less logical, common-sense conclusions. Says Mr Srsa: "This is what mind does – it plants the seed of doubt through its endless analyzing, fragmenting and splintering of the simple truth, while in all its wisdom it remains completely oblivious of its own limitations." Instead, we should trust our souls. "It's the soul that 'knows'. It's the soul that from time to time drops this divine nectar of realization that keeps mind alive and busy with its ruminating thoughts." If you believe there's a smidgen of self-contradiction there, don't worry; after all, Mr Srsa doesn't. For what, he asks, "is a belief but an unsubdued fear?"

The soul, it seems, is driven by love, and love does the mind good too. After that it gets a little opaque: "Love… comes in many forms and shapes but it always fuses two sides of duality in one truth. It's an absolute cause (and effect) of all relative dualities. The cause of all relative thoughts of the mind is an absolute truth of the heart… Unless you read with the same heart that writers of the holy scriptures wrote their words down, you will never understand their meaning." All this non-thinking will allow us to "Relax and cherish the moment of truth" when the world ends come December. So that's all right then. If, that is, I've understood the reams of rabbitry in which Mr Srsa hides these gems.

Cod wisdom aside, he makes a bit more effort than the average waffler at tackling the New Age's favourite fallback, quantum mechanics, to justify all this somehow (*any*how). It doesn't get him very far, and for the reader it's somewhat worse than reading *Finnegan's Wake* with a hangover and an axe stuck in your back. One of the less numbing passages: "What is the precession but the duration of time, which is limitation of time? The precession is time of time or an accelerated time (gravity); hence a shadow below of 4D (solar) space above, because double time is space just as double negation is affirmation. The precession is the limitation that slices the linear flow of time into discrete units (quanta) with precisely determined points of beginning and end of each quantum state or each relative incarnation of orbiting particle. It is the quantum of the surrounding solar space (4D) doubling as the time period of the embedded Earth (3D). The quantum of solar space or alternatively the duration of the present time is precession, because the smallest unit of 4D spacetime is (just as the smallest unit of subsequent 5D and 6D cosmic densities is 1/5 and 1/6 thus determining yet larger cycles of time)." And so, exhaustingly, on.

Underneath all his stuff about love, really, Mr Srsa is like so many other apocalyptics who don't much like the world as it is, and would very much like it to go away. The 2012 apocalypse will bring "a destruction and cataclysm beyond all your imagination and yet only such destruction will cleanse the world of its accumulated negative karma of the materialistic and selfish existence". I wonder what he (and a few million others) will do when they wake up on 22 December and find themselves staring out at the same old dross that sickens them so.

Meanwhile, the rest of you can read *all* the way through the references below. Why should I suffer alone to bring you a world without end? Amen.

Sources
www.endoftime2012.com/
http://bit.ly/N8Rt8J (prophetsmanual.com).

SORRY, I CAME TOO SOON

It would be fair to call many New Agers religious, even if theirs is a kind of para-religion that dare not speak its name. We don't hear much about what God and his sublunar spokespersons think of the approaching cataclysm/enlightenment/paradigm shift/monstrous anti-climax, possibly because ladies and gentlemen of the cloth have more pressing things to think about, such as the rained-off church fête, the Sufi Question, or what to do about Mrs Goldberg's crush on the younger rabbi. But there's always an exception. Ronald Weinland describes himself as "the pastor of God's Church on earth, [who] has also been appointed by the God of Abraham as His end-time prophet to foretell the final events leading up to Christ's return". So we can take it from Prophet Weinland, then, that he knows whereof he speaks when he says that four Trumpets will sound – the first on 14 December 2008 – beginning "a countdown… that will end by May 27, 2012." Yes, you did read that correctly. Eeek! What are we all doing here?

Sources
www.cog-pkg.org/
www.the-end.com/RonaldWeinland.asp

WorldMags.net

MATT PATTINSON

SCIENCE

POLTS UNDER ANALYSIS

Paranormal effects are notoriously difficult to assess objectively but, says **DAVID HAMBLING**, the 'noisy ghost' produces real physical effects and should be measurable.

Ghosts are slippery, but science ought to be able to get a grip on poltergeists. While ghosts can be so æthereal that they are only visible to psychic sensitives and not the sceptics standing next to them, poltergeists produce actual, physical effects. It's a lot harder to pin down something that might just be in someone's head than something that moves the furniture around. And a recent Canadian study suggests scientists may finally have a clue about what causes poltergeists.

Poltergeists are scientifically interesting because they have been so consistent over the centuries, with a regular pattern of knocking, throwing things and moving objects. Poltergeist activity often appears to focus around a specific individual, typically an adolescent girl. The idea that poltergeists were an expression of repressed emotions dates back at least to 1909 and an encounter between Freud and Jung. When Freud stated that parapsychology was rubbish, the outraged Jung felt himself getting hotter and hotter until there was a loud bang from a bookcase. Jung (shown above) said this was a "catalytic exteriorisation phenomenon"; Freud thought the suggestion was nonsense, even when Jung correctly predicted a second bang [see **FT264:43**].

The psychological approach, popularised by psychologist Nandor Fodor, moved poltergeists away from the world of spirit mediums and into scientific parapsychology. They were rebranded as 'recurrent spontaneous psychokinesis' or RSPK. Of course, psychokinesis or PK itself has a long history of fraud and fakery. People who can produce large, poltergeist-style effects seem unable to do so under laboratory conditions. This was why the Princeton Engineering Anomalies Research team spent 30 years focusing on micro-PK. Their experiments tested subjects' ability to affect the output of a random number generator driven by quantum-tunnelling.

After millions of experiments, the PEAR researchers concluded that micro-PK worked on about two tries in 10,000.[1] Others failed to replicate these results, and the argument over their validity and statistical significance continues. Meanwhile, PEAR has disbanded; a spin-off company, Psyleron, sells lights that change colour randomly, and which you might (or might not) be able to influence by thought power. We've moved right back from the crash-bang of poltergeists to something only visible to believers. However, if the RSPK theory is correct, then deep emotional involvement is needed to generate a poltergeist effect. You can't create one at will; you have to stalk wild poltergeists in the field.

GETTY IMAGES / HULTON ARCHIVE / CENTRAL PRESS

A paper in the *Journal of Investigative Psychic Research* describes an attempt to do this methodically, a project involving a total of 148 experiments with 'trigger objects' marked and observed with video cameras.[2] Experimenters believed objects had been moved on four occasions. In three of these, the video evidence showed they had not moved, and in the final instance the object was on a sloping surface and the movement was therefore assumed not to be paranormal. Again, mysterious poltergeist effects could only be detected in the eye of the beholder.

Alternatively, rather than looking at a 'haunted house', a team from the Clinical Neuropsychology Laboratory at Laurentian University in Ontario focused on the person associated with poltergeist phenomena in a study published this year.[3] The team included Michael Persinger, who pioneered the exploration of electromagnetic fields and temporal lobe stimulation in paranormal experiences.

Jung felt himself getting hotter, until there was a loud bang from a bookcase

Their interest was in treating Ms S, who has suffered distress from unexplained phenomena after a head injury in a car crash. Phenomena include tapping sounds (also heard by other people) and a sense of an invisible presence. She also reports discharges of light from her left hand, and causing disruption in electronic equipment, in particular making light bulbs burn out. The phenomena seem to increase when she is upset. Ms S can reduce the uncontrolled phenomena by focusing her energy on a scrap of paper balanced on a needle; at least one researcher reported seeing her cause this pinwheel to rotate by concentrating on it.

A detailed study of Ms S's brain, including when she was experiencing the phenomena, showed some very unusual features, in particular anomalous activity over the right temporal lobe. In spite of having examined over 1,000 other patients with head injuries, researchers had never seen anything like it. The researchers also detected tiny (million millionths of a Watt) spontaneous photon emissions that coincided with a particular temporal lobe state.

The researchers found that Ms S could be affected by very weak magnetic fields; Persinger's previous work has suggested a link between geomagnetic activity and reports of strange experiences. After Ms S left the lab, she kept a precise diary of her poltergeist experiences, and they coincided with fluctuations in the Earth's magnetic field.

Temporal lobe patients who sense threatening invisible presences can be helped by listening to music, indicating a possible way of blocking the poltergeist: "We have counselled patients, who experience terrifying nocturnal sensed presences subsequent to closed head injuries, to quickly activate an acoustic source and to listen to music containing lyrics. This simple temporal lobe stimulation eliminates the experience of a sensed presence."

The researchers also suggest that Ms S might be treated by anticonvulsants, and she could benefit from a changed understanding of the cause of the poltergeist. But had they really seen poltergeist effects in the laboratory? From a clinical perspective, it really doesn't matter: "There is no requirement to verify or argue the merits of the veridicality of the phenomena, even the movement of the pin wheel which was seen by members of our group."

So the causes may really all be in someone's head – but the poltergeist effects could be outside it.

NOTES

1 http://bit.ly/NsGqo (princeton.edu).

2 http://bit.ly/RvCwkR (p-s-i.org.uk).

3 http://bit.ly/xW03oD (tandfonline.com); "Case report: A prototypical experience of 'poltergeist' activity, conspicuous quantitative electroencephalographic patterns, and sLORETA [standardized Low Resolution brain Electromagnetic Tomography] profiles – suggestions for intervention"

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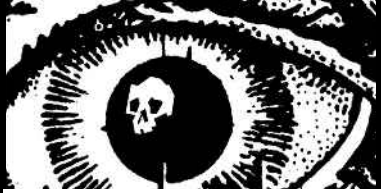

MATT PATTINSON

GHOSTWATCH

ALAN MURDIE reports on poltergeists in Hull and in Barry, Wales, that disrupt peaceful streets, and some attacks in Essex blamed on 16th-century witch burials.

BANG ON THE WALLS

It has long been claimed that tenants in council and social housing invent hauntings as a ruse to obtain a transfer from their accommodation. In April 2012, a new variant of this theme emerged in Kingston-Upon-Hull, East Yorkshire, with a young woman being evicted for noise nuisance, which she tried to blame on a poltergeist.

Thousands of people are losing their homes in Britain each month, but this story matched very nicely the "neighbour from hell" stereotype that sections of the British media have delighted in cultivating in recent years. The eviction of Leanne Fennell, 20, followed complaints by neighbours along Wexford Road in Hull about her holding loud parties night after night, into the early hours. When challenged, the young mother told neighbours that a poltergeist was responsible for playing loud music and throwing empty beer cans into the garden of her home. According to one neighbour, quoted in the *Daily Telegraph*: "She told us a poltergeist would keep switching the music on really loud when she was in bed."

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RIGHT LITTLE DEVIL: Leanne Fennel blamed a poltergeist but was still fined for annoying her neighbours.

Officials from Hull City Council were not impressed by her claims, taking her to court for breaching a noise abatement order. Hull Magistrates' Court were told that loud music was heard coming from Fennell's home on January 13, 16, 18 and 19, after the noise abatement notice had been served by council nuisance officers.

There are precedents. Poltergeists have been known for demanding music; the Enfield poltergeist voice of 1977 demanded jazz music, and in a case in 1944 a poltergeist dubbed 'Wily Willie' supposedly left notes demanding the playing of a gramophone. Notes from this entity were written in a peculiar curly script, and often with spelling mistakes, for instance demanding that the "gram" should be played or there would be "truble". An investigator from the Society for Psychical Research considered that the likely author was the teenage boy around whom the disturbances centred.

Unfortunately, Ms Fennell did not raise her novel poltergeist defence in court, or even attend the hearing. She was found guilty in her absence of four breaches of the abatement notice banning loud music and raised voices, and of another requiring her to remove rubbish from the garden. Instead, Ms Fennell sought to defend herself on her Facebook page, declaring: "First and most of all I'm a proud mum to a beautiful little girl. I'm not fussy… but a girl should try look her best 24/7. I also sin but I'm not the devil, so with me what you see is what you get. I love to party with my mates, well, the ones who can keep up with me that is."

"She told us a poltergeist would keep switching the music on…"

With remarks of this kind, one can almost see the matter as a case of one form of folk devil blaming another. Unfortunately, statements on Facebook don't actually count for anything at Hull magistrates' court, resulting in the Bench ordering her to pay a fine of £370 and costs of £500 to Hull City Council. Council officers also seized four televisions, four DVD players and a CD player for destruction and commenced eviction proceedings.

Another example of a woman attributing her offences to a poltergeist occurred in 2000 in Barry, Wales. In the early hours of 2 December 2000, Adele Gallivan, 40, set light to her curtains in her semi-detached council house. She then went round to her next-door neighbour and asked her to store some items, claiming a chip-pan had ignited and started a fire. On her neighbour calling the fire brigade, Miss Gallivan said "Let it burn" and announced that she had started the blaze to get rid of staring faces in the curtains. When police arrived she was abusive and was arrested. She told police that there was a poltergeist presence in the property that was, as she put it, "sending her nuts". She repeated her claim that faces were leering at her from the curtains and said that when waking in the morning she looked 60 years old, her facial features being distorted by the poltergeist. She maintained that the presence had been getting worse in the previous three years and created a foul smell in the bathroom and that it affected the personalities of her children.

The police refused to believe her and she was prosecuted for arson. In court, her barrister Peter Heywood, stated: "It was her genuine belief that there was an unhealthy presence in that house which caused her problems for some time." Ms Gallivan admitted in court to setting the fire and was sentenced to 15 months in jail. Although the court received evidence that she suffered from a psychiatric condition, she was found to be sane and legally responsible for her actions. The Court of Appeal dismissed her appeal against sentence in March 2001.

SOURCES: *D.Telegraph*, *Metro*, etc, 9 April 2012; Guy Playfair: *This House is Haunted* (1980); *Journal* of the SPR vol.33 1943–46, 224; BBC News, 15 Mar 2001.

NEIGHBOURHOOD WITCH

Meanwhile at St Osyth in Essex, another woman was reportedly responding to troublesome spooks by turning her home into a tourist attraction. The Essex town has long-standing links with the supernatural, being named after a martyred Anglo-Saxon saint, with tradition claiming that St Osyth's headless ghost walks local woodlands once a year. Another legend states that a dragon attacked and burned the town in the 12th century. The ghost of a white-robed monk was sighted at St Osyth's Priory before World War II and again in the 1960s, carrying a candle.

However, in May 2012 media attention focused upon an antique cottage known as

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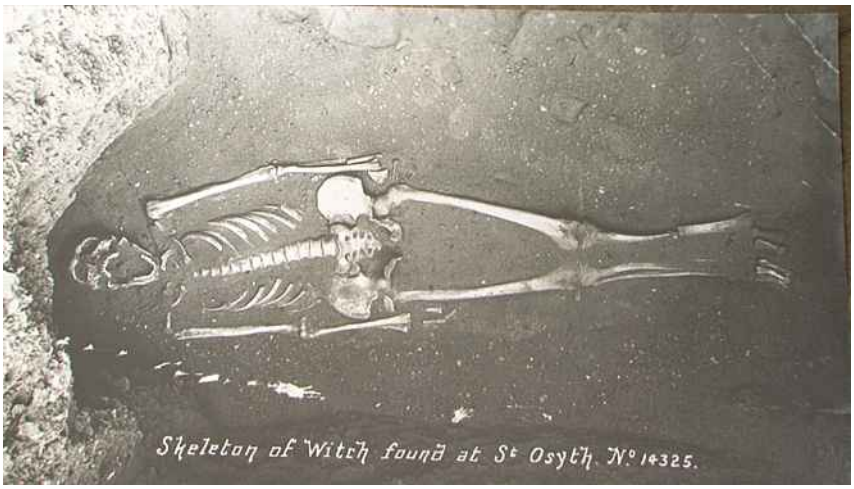
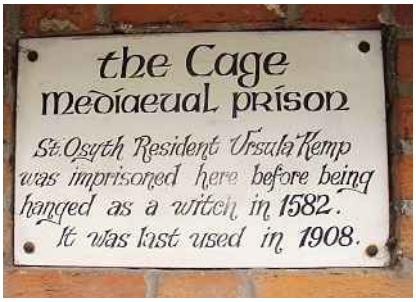
"the Cage" after its former use as a jail, following the news that its owner Vanessa Mitchell, 37, and her baby son Jesse fled the building having been "attacked by ghosts". Ms Mitchell told the *Sun* that she had been struck and had her hair pulled by ghosts in the ancient building and that visitors had been pushed downstairs. Objects had also moved by themselves, doorknobs rattled, taps and the TV were turned on by themselves and what were described as "bloodspots" materialised in her hallway. Vanessa said she had endured this for three years but her nerve finally broke when she saw the apparition of a man in antique clothing and straggly hair standing by the cot of her four-month-old son Jesse. Terrified for his safety, they left, with Vanessa telling reporter Miranda Prynne: "As a single mum, I can't live like this". Vanessa stated that people who lived in the house "seemed to die, get divorced or go mad".

Unfortunately, Vanessa still has a £147,000 mortgage to pay on the cottage and the report claimed that she had decided to open it up to ghost tours and vigils. Further coverage of the story appeared in the *Daily Star* and on *Good Morning TV*. One person who immediately took up the challenge was journalist Miranda Prynne, who covered Vanessa's story for the *Sun*. Ms Prynne set out to spend the night at the Cage and her report described how after dark a chain hanging from a wall began swinging by itself, and she felt an eerie atmosphere and a sudden drop of temperature as the fire spluttered and died. This, along with scratching noises coming from the wall, prompted her to leave before dawn.

In fact, evidence culled from the Internet suggests that Vanessa's home was already hosting profit-making events and ghost-themed evenings stretching back to 2011, with one now defunct website making mention of £35 per night being charged and another referring to a sold-out event held on 29 October 2011. One events company is currently advertising a ghost-hunting event at the Cage on 5 October 2012 at a cost of £59 per person, following a profitable event organised by North London Paranormal Investigations on 12 June 2012. It would be interesting to plot the takings of these events with the alleged levels of paranormal activity.

Curious claims were made about the Cage in May 2011 when one group reported that it had contacted the spirit of a local Pink Floyd fan calling himself 'Phil', who had committed suicide in the area six years before. But undoubtedly the real thrill for paranormal enthusiasts is the association between the Cage and the infamous St Osyth witchcraft trials of 1582 in which 14 women were accused in what the late Peter Haining called "the worst of all witch persecutions" and "one of the blackest spots in the black history of persecution". Haining comments on "the amazing way in which hearsay evidence, the tales of small children and the most vicious prejudices were accepted without question". At least two of the women were hanged, the most famous being Ursula Kemp (or Kempe),




the Cage
mediaeval prison
St Osyth Resident Ursula Kemp
was imprisoned here before being
hanged as a witch in 1582.
It was last used in 1908.

FORCED TO QUIT HOME BY GHOSTS
Mum flees clutching baby

ABOVE: Complete skeletons bound by iron rivets were identified as witches. **LEFT:** The former site of a mediæval prison is a popular tourist attraction. **BELOW:** A press headline on the Cage incidents.

a local nurse, midwife and wise-woman. Ursula may well have been incarcerated in the Cage.

Interest in Ursula's story was revived in a sensational manner when two complete skeletons were discovered in a garden at Mill Street, St Osyth, in 1921. Their identification with Ursula Kemp and fellow witch Elizabeth Bennett rested largely upon the peculiar circumstances of their burial: both bound by iron rivets driven into their knees and elbows. But once reported in the local *Clacton Graphic* and the *Essex County Standard*, the identification was treated as settled, with the remains becoming a macabre local tourist attraction: the Ursula Kemp 'Peep Show' ran in the town for many years.

In the 1960s, Cecil Williamson, founder of the Museum of Witchcraft (now in Boscastle, Cornwall), acquired the remains and put them on display along with the skeleton reputed to be that of local witch Joan Wytte. However, despite the early identification with Ursula Kemp, there was no forensic evidence to support it, nor even confirmation that Williamson really obtained the bones unearthed in 1921. In 2007, it was proposed that the bones might be those of any one of 10 individuals, among them "five who died at Chelmsford before witchcraft trials, as well as three women who were tried as witches in 1645". Subsequent tests suggest that the bones date to Roman times and are derived from several individuals assembled together, some of them male.

However, the discovery of rivets being put through the body is interesting, in light of the similar burials, dubbed 'vampire graves', recently revealed in Bulgaria [**FT291:20**]. Doubtless it is purely coincidental that the Cage with its alleged violent spirits and the site of the witch graves are not any great distance from Beeleigh Abbey in Essex, where in 1974 the former owner, the late Christina Foyle, claimed in an article in *This Essex* magazine to have been disturbed by a vampiric presence. Sleeping in a room that had not been used for 50 years, Miss Foyle was awoken by strange sounds and vibrations and suffered three puncture wounds, two in her neck and one in her finger. On receiving medical treatment, she was told by her doctor that he had found a virus in the wounds that had been unknown for at least 20 years. Miss Foyle vowed never to sleep in that room again.

As Peter Haining wrote: "As a resident of Essex myself… I know how by night a special kind of eeriness and mystery creeps across the county which can give rise to all sorts of fantasies even in the most sophisticated minds…"

SOURCES: *Sun*, 17 May; *D.Star*, 20 May 2012; Andrew Green: *Our Haunted Kingdom* (1973); Peter Haining: *The Witchcraft Papers* (1974); Peter Underwood: *The Vampire's Bedside Companion* (1975); http://bit.ly/PoLSJL (olympiaparanormal.co.uk); http://bit.ly/RP4BRv (investigatorsofparanormalphenomena.com) and many others.

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Ghanaian wonders

A collection of bizarre news gleaned from the tabloids

Churchmind News — Towards a better life for the people

WOMAN DELIVERS CRAB

baby or the mother.

She obeyed the voice of God, and came back as advised. According to Agnes, her delivery date was already overdue, and there was no sign that she would deliver soon. However, after the ministers conducted deliverance on her, she was lying down in the midnight when this strange object crawled out of her womb and landed on her laps.

Agnes narrates her story: "When I first came to the Mountain, I was having some strange feelings. I have had seven children previously, and none of them gave me this kind of experience. I was having incessant cough and other complications. So, I came to the Mountain at Lagun.

"I shouted and people came around me to take care of me. It was a scary object"

Part of it was like a crab, having eight legs and the other part was like the head and tail of a bird.

From the first month to the last of my pregnancy, I always

strange cases? Eya-Isaiah said they are satanic manipulations. "Most of these cases are cases where the devil and his agents were bent on manipulating these victims or out rightly killing them. But God always intervene and set them free as soon as they set their feel on this Mountain.

A CRAB IS BORN

Agnes Oga, a mother of seven, was pregnant again. When she started "feeling funny" with an "incessant cough and other complications", she visited the Mountain of Upliftment at Lagun, along Iwo Road in Ibadan. The baby was overdue, but there was no sign she was about to give birth. "However, after the ministers conducted deliverance on her, she was lying down in the midnight when this strange object crawled out of her womb and landed on her laps… Part of it was like a crab, having eight legs, and the other part was like the head and tail of a bird." (above) Mrs Oga said: "From the first month to the last of my pregnancy, I always had terrible pains down the lower part of my belly. This continued until the day I was delivered of the strange object." Three days after this, she gave birth to "a bouncing baby boy".

Asked if such a birth was normal on the Mountain, Prophetess Oyetola Abigail Eya-Isaiah, the coordinator of the Mountain, said that it was, adding that one baby "was born with what looked like machete cuts on his head. It took two weeks of labour for the baby to be delivered. There was another case where the mother had to first deliver the cob of a corn before the baby could be delivered. We had also a case where a woman laboured for four days… to our surprise, neither water nor blood came out of her. She gave birth to that baby dry, and the baby survived."

"Most of these cases are cases where the Devil and his agents were bent on manipulating these victims or killing them outright, but God always intervenes and sets them free as soon as they set their feet on this Mountain," said the prophetess. "God is delivering a lot of people here." For instance, "there was a woman with a terrible decaying sore, already having maggots who was brought to the Mountain. We just applied the Blood of Jesus on the sore and the whole thing dried up and she got healed." Prophet Ezekiel Adeyanju Anifowose backed up his colleague's testimony, saying that many cases rejected by the hospitals had ended up on the Mountain, and "God had been taking the glory over them all". *Churchmind Christian News (Accra, Ghana), 20 Mar 2012.*

"…it won't be easy for many things to be done around the Bui River"

Back in 1726, there was the celebrated imposture of Mary Tofts, who claimed to have given birth to 17 rabbits [**FT57:26, 108:28, 202:40**]. Other odd birth claims include human-headed spider [**FT44:41**], mudfish [**FT57:26**], eel with golden earrings [**FT128:8**] and goat [**FT205:24**].

MERMAID BLOCKS DAM

Chinese engineers working on the Bui dam at Tain in the Brong Ahafo region of Ghana found that the functioning of their excavating machinery was obstructed by some force they regarded as supernatural, so they consulted "spiritualist scientists" in a Shanghai temple. These talented chaps "immediately spotted in the spiritual realm a mermaid (Mame Water) being the cause of the impediment to the smooth sail of events on the dam site". One of them travelled to the Bui River in Ghana and managed to capture "a weird beast in the form of a snake with the head and hands of a woman" (which, judging from the picture shown at left, evidently had the power to prevent itself being photographed in focus).

A local priest said the "river goddess" should be returned to its habitat "else it won't be easy for many things to be done around the Bui River". The priest explained that it was not the sort of entity that is normally visible to us. "It is not good to see this kind of Mame Water physically," he said. "They are spiritual

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creatures which always remain unseen and the moment they are physically seen it means there is something gone wrong." *My Joy (Accra, Ghana), 10 June 2012.*

GONE WITH THE WIND

Under the headline "The Black Room at Tamale", John Bosco Donko tells the strange story of a tenant in his building. Ben Abuduk wrote applying for accommodation, saying that he "suffered from a strange disease which rendered him deaf and dumb and that he needed complete freedom and undisturbed life". For a year, he stayed in the apartment block without speaking to anyone. He was seen leaving early in the morning and returning late at night; no one knew where he went or what he did. One night, the other tenants were woken by the noise of a woman's shrieks coming from Abuduk's room. They shouted and knocked on his door, but he failed to respond. The noise abated slightly, but groaning was heard until about 4.00am, when Abuduk was seen leaving alone, locking his door behind him. Later that morning, the tenants knocked on the door for 10 minutes, but there was no reply.

Abuduk returned at 10pm, but Ablika, one of the other tenants, blocked his way and demanded to know what had been going on during the night. Abuduk signalled for Ablika to move aside, but Ablika repeated his questions, threatening to knock him down if he didn't reply. Abuduk just repeated his signal to move, whereupon Ablika lunged towards him. His target dodged the blow with lightning speed and Ablika crashed heavily against the opposite wall, bruising his face and shoulders. He then gave Abuduk an uppercut under the chin. "To our amazement," said John Bosco Donko, "we could not see Ben Abuduk; rather, a whirling wind at the place he had stood. The door of his room opened and the whirling wind went in and suddenly, Ben Abuduk's belongings, including his bags and tape recorder, started moving out of the room with terrific speed. The door got locked by an invisible force. The wind moved away until we could see it no more." *The Spectator (Accra, Ghana), 16 April 2012.*

A–Z ALIEN ZOO

KARL SHUKER presents his regular round-up from the crypto-zoological garden

CHRIS SMITH

ABOVE: A reconstruction of the legendary 'Thunderbird' photo.

PISTOL-PACKING PYTHONS?

During my cryptozoological researches into mystery snakes, I have encountered several frustratingly brief and only very vague reports of unidentified serpents (some pythonesque in form) that can allegedly fire or spit solid missiles out of their mouths – rather than streams of venom like the famous spitting cobras. However, veteran field cryptozoologist Bill Gibbons has lately unearthed a more precise, detailed account. It was in a book entitled *I Saw Congo* (1952) by ER Moon, a missionary from 1908 to 1923 in the Belgian Congo (later Zaire, now the Democratic Congo). The relevant passage reads as follows:

*All over the Central Congo Basin the natives told me of a snake they call "*jibate*", that "throws poisonous missiles", hurling them with deadly accuracy fifteen or twenty feet [5–6m]. One man told me that they would always throw at some bright object. He said, "If you are carrying a gun with bright metal parts, just hold the gun off to one side and you can hear the missiles strike the metal, one at a time. When the snake has hurled all its missiles it is harmless, but if you do not kill it after you are gone it will gather them up to use again." I never put any stock in the story for I soon found that while the children of the jungle have wonderful general knowledge of animal life, their observations are made with far from scientific accuracy.*

Presumably, therefore, the enigmatic jibate must pick up small pebbles or similar objects off the ground with its mouth (in which they become coated with its fangs' venom), and then fire them with some force at an antagonist or prey. In the same book by Moon, a local pygmy even claimed that this snake detaches and spits forth its own fangs directly into a prey victim. In support, he showed Moon a large snake as broad as the missionary's arm and about 5ft (1.5m) long, which had one fang missing, and then he cut the snake open and removed from its stomach a large rat in which the missing fang was embedded. However, other locals denied that the jibate spat its own fangs, and it seems far more likely that this particular snake, while biting or attempting to swallow the rat, had broken off one of its fangs, which had then become firmly embedded in the rat's body. Nevertheless, whether any snake deliberately picks up and spits objects as missiles is an open question; it is not impossible. *Bill Gibbons, pers. comm., 30 July 2012.*

A BIRD IN THE HAND NO LONGER?

Several years ago, I heard about a mysterious stuffed bird supposedly on display in the Canadian town of Spanish, Ontario, which may have been a *bona fide* thunderbird. Needless to say, I was keen to learn more about it, but despite contacting Spanish's town hall to request information, I never received any response. However, after recently alerting the readers of my ShukerNature blog to this tantalising case, Facebook friend Rebecca Tosh Xayasith kindly promised to investigate, and I have now received her news:

I did... find out, through a friend, that the nearby Massey Area Museum had never heard anything about it... the local library has heard nothing about it either. Spanish is a small town, population around 650+, and it is on the decline. They lose more people every year. If indeed there IS a stuffed bird, I'm wondering if it is a bird that is known to the world, but maybe not known to the people of that area. And this town is slowly dying. I would imagine, if they had such a thing as a stuffed Thunderbird, they would use it to the town's advantage. They would attract MANY tourists if they had such a thing, and it just might save the town. So, I seriously doubt there is anything there, or anything that is unknown to the world.

So, sadly, it would seem that either the bird of Spanish was just an unfounded rumour; or, if it did indeed exist, it was discarded or transferred elsewhere; or maybe it is still there but is nothing of zoological significance. In short, stuffed or otherwise, figuratively if not literally, it is evident that the bird has flown. *Rebecca Tosh Xayasith, pers. comm., 3 Aug 2012.*

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MATT PATTINSON

ARCHÆOLOGY

PAUL SIEVEKING reports on some long-lost lingerie, an unusual human-bovine burial, British civilisation before the Romans, plus some Sardinian stone warriors predating China's terracotta army.

MEDIÆVAL UNDIES

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Fashion history has been rewritten following the discovery of linen brassières hidden in a vault beneath the floorboards of Lengberg Castle in East Tyrol, Austria. They are thought to have been buried there in 1480 when the building was extended, and the exceptionally dry conditions stopped them from disintegrating. The find included four bras and two pairs of underpants; two of the bras are described rather bluntly as "shirts with bags", but the others had fitted caps and shoulder straps like their modern counterparts. One had a possible back strap, "not preserved but indicated by partially torn edges of the cups onto which it was attached". The bras (an example is shown at left) were intricately decorated with lace and other ornamentation, suggesting they were not merely functional but intended to please a suitor. They were found in 2008 among more than 2,700 fragments of clothing and other detritus, but the discovery was only publicised by a recent article in *BBC History Magazine*.

Men are known to have worn undershorts in mediæval times, but it had been assumed that women simply wore a chemise, and that knickers didn't come into use until the late 18th century; bras were thought to be an even more modern invention, appearing around 100 years ago when tight corsets were abandoned. Beatriz Nutz of the University of Innsbruck said her discovery had been greeted with scepticism until radiocarbon dating confirmed the age of the underwear. Nutz believes the underpants were for men, because, she said, they "were considered a symbol of male dominance and power". Mediæval drawings often show a man and a woman fighting for a pair of underpants in a symbolic battle to see who "wears the trousers" in the family. *[AP] D.Mail, 17 July; telegraph.co.uk, 18 July; The Week, 28 July 2012*.

WOMAN BURIED WITH COW

Archæologists excavating an Anglo-Saxon cemetery in Oakington, Cambridgeshire, say the discovery of a woman buried with a cow is a "genuinely bizarre" find. "Animal burials are extremely rare, anyway," said Dr Duncan Sayer from the University of Central Lancashire, the dig's co-director. "Grave goods including brooches indicated the woman was of high status. There are only 31 horse burials in Britain and they are all with men. This is the first animal to be discovered with a woman from this period – the late fifth century – and it's really interesting that it's a cow, a symbol of economic and domestic wealth and power. It's also incredibly early to find any grave of a woman buried with such obvious wealth." The skeleton was found with grave goods including brooches and hundreds of amber and decorated glass beads. "She also had a complete chatelaine [keychain] set, which is an iron girdle and a symbol of her high status," said Dr Sayer, adding: "The cow burial is unique in Europe which makes this an incredibly exciting and important find." *BBC News, 25 June 2012*.

Dr DUNCAN SAYER

ABOVE: An Anglo-Saxon grave in Cambridgeshire contained a woman's remains with a cow skeleton.

ANCIENT BRITISH SOPHISTICATION

Iron Age Britons were importing olives a century before the Romans arrived, say archæologists who have discovered an olive stone in a well in Silchester, Hampshire. The stone came from a layer securely dated to the first century BC, making it the earliest ever found in Britain. Earlier finds of herbs such as coriander, dill and celery, previously believed to have arrived with the Romans, suggest a diet in Silchester that would be familiar in any pizza restaurant.

The excavators, led by Prof. Mike Fulford of Reading University, also found the skeleton of a tiny dog, no bigger than a modern toy poodle, carefully buried, curled up as if in sleep. "It was found in the foundations of a very big house we are still uncovering – 50 metres [164ft] long at least – so we believe it may turn out to be the biggest Iron Age building in Britain," said Prof. Fulford. He now believes that the town was at its height a century before the Roman invasion of AD 43, with regularly planned, paved streets, drainage, shops, houses and workshops, trading across Europe for

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luxury imports of food, household goods and jewellery, enjoying a lifestyle in Britain that, previously, was thought to have arrived with the Romans. *Guardian, 20 July 2012*.

STONE WARRIORS

Archæologists on Sardinia have pieced together about 5,000 fragments of smashed sculpture to recreate a group of life-sized stone warriors destroyed in the middle of the first millennium BC, the only such collection ever found in Europe. Though much less numerous than China's Terracotta Army, they are 500 years earlier. After eight years of work, 25 of the original 33 warriors – archers, shield-holding 'boxers' and swordsmen – have been reconstructed and are on show (example below) this summer at the Cagliari museum in southern Sardinia. The warriors were originally placed on guard over the graves of elite Iron Age Sardinians in the eighth century BC. They could well have been destroyed by the Carthaginians, who invaded the island about 200 years later. *Independent, 17 Feb 2012*.

CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

155. ROMAN 'RED-TOPS'

(For fuller, i.e. duller, exposition, see *Chiron* 9, 1979, 183–201.)

The Romans had a daily paper of sorts, the *Acta Diurna*. No copy survives. The eleven fragments published (Pighius, *Annales*) in 1615 are widely regarded as forgeries; AW Lintott, *Papers of the British School at Rome* 54 (1986), pp213–28 has a more trusting view.

Various writers have boldly likened this *Gazette* (lit. 'Daily Record') to London's *Times* or the tabloids. Was it the Roman *Fortean Times*? Not quite. But, perhaps, not quite not.

Julius Cæsar (Suetonius, ch20 para1) enacted in 59 BC that both the Senate's Proceedings (Roman *Hansard*) and People's be published, the latter on a daily basis (hence *Diurna*). This was not Cæsar the Dictator but Cæsar the Consul, with an electorate to persuade or gull. Whether he was innovating or expanding previous practice isn't clear. As a populist, it would suit him to make senatorial business public, to let the voters know which senators opposed popular measures.

Augustus suppressed publication of the *Hansard* but not the *People's Gazette*. Neither policy seems to have been reversed by his successors. They must either have deemed the latter too trivial to ban or were confident of controlling its contents.

Probably the latter. Some emperors (evidences from Dio Cassius, Suetonius, and Tacitus) allowed select senatorial items to appear in the *Gazette*, rather like the old *Times* juxtaposition of Commons and Lords reports. When whipping up support for current treason trials, Tiberius shrewdly ensured publication of the defendants' personal abuse of himself. Contrariwise, Domitian sought to make his victims 'unpersons' by forbidding publication of their names.

Cicero's letters to various friends evidence the *Gazette*'s early history. We know from him that issues carried specific dates, that their headlines – for example, an assassination attempt on Mark Antony – were sometimes made up for a good story – and that the verbal style could be hard-hitting.

When Claudius introduced his three short-lived new letters to the Roman alphabet, the *Gazette* dutifully tried them out for a while (Suetonius, ch41 para3), a pre-Shavian experiment that doubtless infuriated the Roman equivalents to 'Disgusted of Tunbridge Wells'.

The strait-laced Seneca grumbled that every issue was full of divorces, implying some kind of social gossip columns (*On Good Deeds*, bk3 ch16 para 2). Tacitus grumbles about its tedious reports of new buildings – a thinly-disguised snort at emperors' edifice complexes (*Annals*, bk13. ch31 para1), thus providing further clues as to what went into its pages.

More exotic-cum-fortean items, drawn mainly from Pliny's *Natural History* and Juvenal's *Satires*, include mysterious rains of bricks and milk admixed with blood (various parallels in Fort); an amazingly loyal dog; a polyphiloprogenitive ex-slave seen in public with eight children, 27 grandchildren, 18 great-grandchildren, and eight granddaughters by marriage; the birth of a phœnix; a homosexual marriage; and the suttee of a grief-demented fan on the pyre of his favourite charioteer.

We might infer from this last that the *Gazette* carried racing news – and tips? – also perhaps gladiator results, although there were other ways of disseminating such tidings: the enterprising racing-chariot owner Cæcina sent news of his triumphs to friends via carrier swallows painted in victory colours.

What we know nothing about is the nuts and bolts of the *Gazette*'s production. Where and how was it published? Who were the reporters? Casual allusions in Cicero and Juvenal may suggest that its format was a mix of broadsheet and tabloid, written across the page rather than in columns, implying a series of headlines.

Did Nero plant news of his latest song? Was Julius Cæsar's *Veni Vidi Vici* inspired by or inspirer of a *Gazette* headline – Roman version perhaps of the *Sun*'s (in)famous GOTCHA!

Were there cartoons? Romans liked pictorial caricatures – See my *Roman & Byzantine Papers*, Amsterdam, 1989, pp565–78. One of the most famous (Tertullian, *Apology*, ch16 paras 12–13) satirised Christians as worshipping a donkey man.

How long the *Gazette* lasted is unclear. Some think the transfer of power from Rome to Constantinople sounded its death-knell, though it might have moved or expanded there. Ambiguous items in fourth-century Roman writers (Ammianus and the *Augustan History*) may or may not allude to *Gazette* items. I'd suggest the fact that demands for publication and preservation of the Theodosian Code's laws do not mention it implies that there was no *Gazette* by 438 in either capital.

One thing we do know. *Editor* is a Latin word with two meanings. First, the sponsor of gladiatorial games – I pass this on to the *Sunday Sport*. Second, the exuder of smells – let the Fleet Street-Wapping crowd make of that what they will.

Actis Forteanis a Barrio Baldwinio scriptum.

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ANIMAL ALARMS

Dogs, cats – and even sheep – can apparently detect the early onset of a wide range of human diseases.

LUNG CANCER

● Researchers from Schillerhöhe Hospital in Germany have confirmed that sniffer dogs can detect lung cancer by smelling breath samples. They worked with specially trained dogs and 220 volunteers, including some with lung cancer, some with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and some with no lung health problems. The dogs successfully identified 71 samples with lung cancer out of a possible 100, and correctly detected 372 samples that did not have lung cancer out of a possible 400. They were also able to detect lung cancer independently from COPD and tobacco smoke. It is thought that the dogs are detecting volatile organic compounds (VOCs) produced in lung cancer cases, but the specific VOCs are as yet unidentified. "It is unfortunate the dogs cannot communicate the biochemistry of the scent of cancer," said Thorsten Walles, who led the study and published its findings in the *European Respiratory Journal* in August 2011. Lung cancer is the UK's biggest cancer killer with more than 39,000 cases annually, of which only 25 per cent will survive a year as the disease is mostly found at an advanced stage. *[R] D.Mail, 18 Aug 2011.*

● According to James Walker, director of the Sensory Research Institute at Florida State University in Tallahassee, dogs' sense of smell is generally 10,000 to 100,000 times superior to that of humans. Much more of the dog brain is devoted to smell than it is in humans. Dogs also have a greater convergence of neurons from the nose to the brain than humans do. "The dog's brain and nose hardware is currently the most sophisticated odour detection device on the planet," said Michael McCulloch, who led a study of canine disease-detection in 2005. "Technology now has to rise to meet that challenge." *National Geographic News, 12 Jan 2006.*

CATERS NEWS AGENCY LTD

BOWEL AND PROSTATE CANCER

● In research carried out at Kyusha University in Japan, a nine-year-old female labrador named Marine demonstrated an impressive ability to sniff out bowel cancer. Marine was trained at the St Sugar Cancer Sniffing Dog Training Centre in Chiba, Japan. Between 2005 and 2009, she learnt to distinguish the smell of a dozen different cancers including breast, stomach, prostate, bladder and skin cancer. In the latest study of bowel cancer, Marine completed 74 sniff tests, each involving five samples of breath or fæces, only one of which was cancerous. To identify a sample, she was required to sit in front of it and to ignore the other four samples after sniffing them. She was rewarded for each correct choice. The samples came from 48 people with confirmed bowel cancer and 258 disease-free controls. Marine got the right answer in 33 out of 36 breath tests and 37 out of 38 fæces tests – accuracy ratings of 92 and 97 per cent respectively. The results were written up in *Gut*, the journal of the British Society of Gastroenterology.

Penny stepped on Sharon's breast, which caused pain

The NHS screening programme tests for small amounts of blood in fæces, but only picks up about one in 10 early cases of bowel cancer. One in 20 people in the UK develop the disease, and more than 16,000 die from it each year. As it would be impractical and expensive to employ dogs and their trainers to screen patients, the challenge is to determine which VOCs indicate the onset of which cancers. *BBC News, Independent, Metro, 1 Feb 2011.*

● Former stray cat Whisky, who usually bit anyone who tried to stroke him, suddenly became very affectionate towards his owner, Barry Gardham, 70, a farmer from Hornsea, East Yorkshire. "I had heard that animals can tell when humans are ill and it started to bother me," he said. "Despite being fit as a fiddle, I went to the doctor's and they found I had prostate cancer." He was given the all-clear 15 months later, following an operation. *Sunday Mirror, 10 April 2011; D.Express, 28 Jan 2012.*

BREAST CANCER

● A sheep saved his shepherd's life when he helped detect a deadly tumour. Emma Turner, 41, who works on a farm in Wooton Bassett, Wiltshire, was trying to give Alfie his medication when he repeatedly head-butted her in the chest. The five-year-old Cotswold, normally well behaved, had to be held down by Ms Turner and two others. When she had the resulting bruises checked out, she was found to be in the early stages of breast cancer. She said: "The doctors said that if Alfie hadn't done what he did, I wouldn't have found the lump for a few years, by which time it would have spread. Everyone at the hospital is convinced that Alfie saved my life." She had four months of chemotherapy and was preparing for a mastectomy. She rescued Alfie when his mother died during the birth, and said he had now repaid the favour. *Metro, 14 June 2011.*

● Every night for two weeks, a 10-month-old kitten called Fidge leapt up and sat on the right breast of Wendy Humphrey while she lay on the sofa watching television. Mrs Humphreys, 52, from Wroughton, Wiltshire, visited her doctor as her right breast felt

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bruised. Tests revealed a pea-sized cancerous lump, which could have been fatal if left undiagnosed. She had chemotherapy and was due to have a mastectomy in March. It was suggested that the kitten was attracted to the breast because the tumour increased its temperature. *D.Express, D.Mirror, 24 Jan 2012.*

● Valerie Lubbock, 74, of Tadworth in Surrey, says her cat Bindi saved her life when it jumped up, put its paws on her breasts and stared straight into her face. She stood, brushed herself off and found a lump. She has since had a mastectomy. *D.Mirror, 27 July 2012.*

● Last November, Sharon Rawlinson, 43 (opposite), from Newark, Nottinghamshire, was given a Cavalier King Charles Spaniel by her husband. The 18-month-old dog, called Penny, began sniffing and pawing at her breast. She ignored the behaviour until Penny stepped on her chest, causing pain. She examined herself and found a 1.3in (33mm) lump. Her doctor sent her to hospital for tests, and Penny continued to paw her while she waited for the results. She began chemotherapy in March and had a mastectomy in July. "As soon as I started chemotherapy," she said, "[Penny] stopped going near the breast." *D.Mirror, 27 July; BBC News, 30 July 2012.*

● Maureen Burns, 64, from Rugby in Warwickshire, realised something was wrong when Max, her 10-year-old red collie cross, began moping round he house, as well as sniffing her breath and nudging her right breast. A biopsy revealed a cancerous tumour; she had two operations and radiotherapy, and her prognosis was excellent. *D.Mirror, 23 Feb; D.Mail, 27 Feb 2009.*

● Brenda Jones, 47, from Merthyr Tydfil, South Wales, found a lump after her five-year-old spaniel, called Mrs Murphy, started nuzzling at, and eventually jumping up and pawing, her left breast. At the time of the report, she was on chemotherapy after surgery. *D.Mirror, 28 Sept 2011.*

DIABETES

● Rebecca Farrar, seven, has an aggressive form of diabetes, meaning a hypoglycæmic attack could send her into a coma. A Labrador called Shirley keeps an eye on her and if she senses a drop in Rebecca's blood sugar levels she continually licks her as a warning. If Shirley still gets no response, she is trained to go and fetch a medical testing kit in the classroom at Harpole Primary School in Northamptonshire. If Rebecca's blood sugar levels fall at night, Shirley tries to wake her by licking her legs and feet; if that doesn't work, she wakes Rebecca's mother Claire. *telegraph.co.uk, 7 Feb 2011.*

● Bonnie, a puppy aged 15 weeks, has saved her three-year-old owner, Olivia-Mae, from falling into a diabetic coma eight times. When she detects the child's blood sugar level is falling, the cocker spaniel barks and nips her mother Jodie Steed, 24, to alert her. Mrs Steed, from Tuffley, Gloucestershire, said specially trained dogs can cost £12,000 – so she taught Bonnie herself. *D.Mirror, 17 May 2012.*

EPILEPSY

● Janice Gardener, 47, of Rackenford in Devon, was stricken with epilepsy after she was badly hurt falling off a horse in 2009. She used to collapse up to five times a day and kept finding bruises. Then Titch, her 14-year-old Jack Russell, learned to forewarn her that a seizure was imminent by jumping, barking, and licking her face, giving her time to gulp down medication. She said: "At first I just thought she wanted attention. Now when she jumps up I just think, 'Oh, here we go'." *Sun, 25 Aug 2010.*

● Lilly, a 14-month-old cat, can detect when Nathan Cooper, 18, is about to have an epileptic seizure, and alerts his mother by running between her and Nathan, miaowing loudly. The family, who live in Bournemouth, Dorset, had had Lilly for barely a year, but Tracey Cooper, 38, believed the cat had already saved her son's life at least once, saying: "After one fit, Nathan stopped breathing, and Lilly started licking his mouth, which somehow kick-started his breathing. Now she won't leave his side." The college student has suffered from epilepsy for 10 years and has fits roughly once a week. Mrs Cooper, a full-time carer for her son and her disabled husband, said Lilly could normally detect an oncoming seizure by up to five minutes before it happens. *[PA] D.Mail, 14 Mar 2011.*

KONSPIRACY KORNER

ROBIN RAMSAY, EDITOR OF LOBSTER MAGAZINE, REPORTS FROM THE BUNKER ON...

GOVERNMENT INTERFERENCE WITH FREE DISCUSSION

We are knee-deep in reports of conspiracies by bankers – not to run the world, but simply to make themselves rich. Curious to see what the conspiracy theory world was saying about this, I began trawling through Google and found little, perhaps because understanding the current set of financial crises requires technical knowledge, and that is not conspiracy theorists' *forte*. During my site-hopping, I noticed that in lieu of financial analyses, many carried a couple of quotations attributed to notorious 'one worlder' David Rockefeller, of Bilderberg, Council on Foreign Relations and Trilateral fame.

One is: "We are on the verge of a Global transformation. All we need is the right major crisis and the nations will accept the New World Order." [1]

Rockefeller (below) allegedly said this in 1994 to the United Nations Business Council (actually the Business Council for the United Nations), although some American sceptics have suggested that the quote is actually a modification of the following snippet from a Rockefeller speech to the UN in 1995: "This present window of opportunity which during a truly peaceful and interdependent world order might be built will not be open for too long. Already there are powerful forces at work that threaten to destroy all of our hopes and efforts." [2]

The next quote is even more widely reproduced.

"We are grateful to the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times*, *Time* magazine and other great publications whose directors have attended our meetings and respected the promises of discretion for almost 40 years. It would have been impossible for us to develop our plan for the world if we had been subject to the bright lights of publicity during those years. But, the world is now more sophisticated and prepared to march towards a world-government. The supranational sovereignty of an intellectual elite and world bankers is surely preferable to the national autodetermination practised in past centuries."

GETTY IMAGES / PETER KRAMER

I'm sure Rockefeller and his ilk *think* this; but did he actually *say* it? Well, he is reputed to have done so at a 1991 Bilderberg meeting. Apparently – the great weasel word of the conspirasphere – it came originally from an unnamed Swedish participant at that meeting. There were, indeed, three Swedes present (as well as the young Gordon Brown and the young Bill Clinton) but beyond that nothing more is known. The most reliable-seeming of the versions of this quote's source attributes it to two small French publications and a newsletter run by the late Hilaire du Berrier, who presumably picked it up from the French sources.

If his Wiki entry is to believed, Hilaire du Berrier (originally Hal) had a fascinating life, but he described his politics as "monarchist" and wrote for far-right American journals. He was in the pre-Internet business of selling subscriptions to a newsletter he published in Monaco ($75 per annum in the 1980s) offering "intelligence". I used to see other such "intelligence" newsletters occasionally, and they were essentially a device for parting gullible Americans from their money. Du Berrier's might have been different, but I doubt it.

This need to embellish what people like Rockefeller actually say arises from the gap between what American nativists like du Berrier believe to be the intentions of 'one worlders' such as Rockefeller, and what these figures actually say and do. Rather than modify their beliefs, conspiracy theorists invent or embellish the quotations which confirm them; and these are then recycled by fellow believers.

NOTES

1 This is repeated by all and sundry online, including the publisher of *Hustler* magazine, Larry Flynt, in 2009 at http://huff.to/5i8Dt (huffingtonpost.com).

2 See http://bit.ly/R4AZ2S (other.skepticproject.com).

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FLYINGSAUCERY

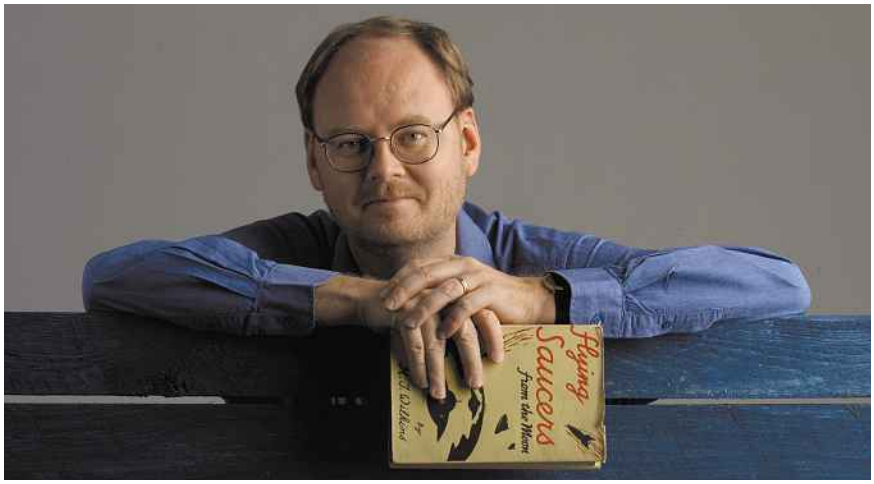
ANDY ROBERTS & DR DAVID CLARKE PRESENT THEIR REGULAR SURVEY OF THE LATEST FADS AND FLAPS FROM THE WORLD OF UFOLOGY

SWEDEN'S ROCKET MAN

Sweden is notorious for its 'ghost rockets', the 1946 wave of pre-Kenneth Arnold UFOs witnessed by thousands of people and never satisfactorily explained. There have been intermittent sightings since the 1940s, and a multi-disciplinary team of researchers and investigators is mounting an expedition to solve the mystery.

Just before 12 o'clock on 31 July 1980, a Swedish couple holidaying by a lake in northern Sweden had their attention drawn to a noise in the sky. Looking up, they saw a steel grey, elongated cigar-shaped object with protrusions on its sides. The rocket-like object descended, turned and landed on the water at the far end of the lake. "We took the binoculars and looked at the object that was sitting on the water but soon it started to sink with bubbles coming from it," said Bo Berg, one of the witnesses. Led by UFO-Sweden's Clas Svahn (right), and with a team including the original witnesses, divers and a film crew, the team will spend a month at the lake. They will use inflatable boats, underwater cameras, a side sonar scanner and metal detectors and it is hoped they will be able to locate and film the object.

Svahn believes the Bergs's close-proximity daylight sighting to be reliable and thinks the object is still there, at the bottom of the lake. But what if they don't find anything? Does that negate the witness testimony? Svahn thinks not: "It could mean that somebody has been there removing the object before us. In 1999, an object with similar description crashed in Värmland in the west of Sweden. The Swedish military searched the whole lake and found nothing. In the secret documents from the investigation, it is stated that the ones that sent the object could very well have been there collecting it before the military arrived." *http://bit.ly/M1LbsQ (YouTube); http://on.fb.me/r90wY1 (Facebook)*.



UFO-SVERIGE

RUNNING RABBITS DOWN UNDER

The National Archives of Australia are following Britain's lead with the release of a stream of UFO files that include the file on the unexplained disappearance of pilot Frederick Valentich (**FT292:28**). In August, another file withheld for 30 years revealed details of an incident that was probably the closest the Royal Australian Air Force has come to scrambling fighter jets to intercept a UFO. The alert was sounded after air traffic controllers tracked strange phenomena on radar at Sydney airport in June 1983. They watched targets located to the north of the city moving at "alleged speeds of 1,100–6,500 km/h [680–4,000mph] that suggested high altitude". Three RAAF officers were sent to investigate, with instructions to scramble Mirage jets "if a reasonable chance of interception presented itself". But what was called Operation Close Encounter ended when Squadron Leader K Keenan checked whether the radar blips could have been caused by unusual atmospheric conditions. Seasoned ufologists will be aware that such phenomena are a common explanation for UFOs on radar and were invoked by the USAF to explain the 'flap' over Washington DC in 1952 and, more recently, as the source of the New Zealand UFO wave in 1978–79. Keenan's report reveals the costly RAAF operation could have been avoided by a simple check "across the width of an entire corridor". He said tests showed the radar UFOs reported by Sydney airport "were generated entirely by radar interference known colloquially as 'running rabbits'". And his scathing report reveals that military personnel are just as susceptible to UFO fever as your average enthusiast. His conclusion reads: "Fortunately there was no temptation to launch aircraft and add to the fuel bill occasioned by use of the RAAF Datsun." *Sydney Morning Herald, 5 Aug 2012; http://bit.ly/LoVnlg (naa.gov.au)*.

A TANGLED WEB

"Keep an eye on the skies for saucers during the Olympic Games," former MoD UFO desk jockey Nick Pope – now relocated to California – warned *Daily Mail* readers in June. Predictions that aliens would use summer events to reveal themselves are nothing new and have become a silly season staple following last year's failed prophecy of aliens gate-crashing the Royal Wedding (**FT277:30**). But for some UFO believers Pope's words simply confirmed what they already suspected: that the "former head of the British Government's UFO Project" had some inside knowledge of secret plans. "The government must [plan] – and has planned – for the worst-case scenario: alien attack and invasion," he said. Suitably primed, some worked themselves into a frenzy when footage from the opening ceremony in Stratford, East London, appeared to show a classic saucer-shaped UFO moving silently above the fireworks. Arguments raged for days but sceptics quickly identified the 'UFO' as the Goodyear blimp used by a TV company to film the ceremony. For some, disappointment turned to anger when it emerged the alien invasion 'story' itself was a piece of product-placement to market a computer game. On his UFO radio show, Richard Dolan revealed Pope had no real knowledge of any government plans to deal with alien invasions but was being paid to promote alien-invasion-themed computer games. Dolan slammed the story as "misleading and manipulative" and on his website, Colin Andrews dismissed it as a "scam" and said Pope had "sold us out". Stung by the criticism, Pope told UFO Updates readers that he found it "difficult to believe that anyone could seriously have thought the [media] was reporting an imminent alien invasion, but if you (or anyone else) were fooled by this then I apologise". *D.Mail, 7 Jun, 31 Jul 2012; http://bit.ly/OrViBK (YouTube)*.

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MODERATIONS, PART TWO: 2ND PHOTO, 3RD LAUNCH

Jim Templeton took one of the most mysterious photographs in ufological history in the summer of 1964. A snap of his eldest daughter sitting on the grass of the Solway Marshes had revealed a strange, space-suited entity in the background. It was the start of a bizarre sequence of events (see **FT196:29**; **286:28–29**; **292:29**) – but when I was investigating the case in 1996, Jim told me something else: that there was a second photo.

Jim had cooperated with the police from the start, handing all the evidence over to them for a forensic study by the CID. They took him seriously because he had worked with them, taking fire scene photos, and so had plenty to lose in terms of professional reputation.

This second Solway photo shows a streak of light rising into the air. I realised quickly that it looks like a lens flare (his camera was probably susceptible to such optical effects on the open marshes) and also that it was far more like the image on the *Blue Streak* launch film than his spaceman photo.

Perhaps someone, somewhere, had joined the dots, creating the idea that the same thing had turned up in Australia as was seen on the Cumbrian photo. Maybe it did, but not on the Cumbrian photo most people would have seen.

Another puzzling thing I discovered was that after the story broke the fire brigade asked Jim to give a talk about the now famous photograph. So he went back to the marshes and took some transparencies for his lecture. When the film was returned from the processors it was all present and correct – apart from the shots taken at the same spot on the marsh as the 'spaceman' photo, which were missing.

Jim asked the police to search for his missing pictures. They reminded him of the need for discretion, said that the photographs had been taken for the ongoing government study and that there was nothing they could do. The most likely explanation might be that these shots did not turn out (more lens flares, perhaps?), so the processors only returned the 'good' ones. Or perhaps the police just gave this excuse after weeks of being pestered by the world and its cat over the whole incident. Either way, it is another riddle to be accounted for, and one not solved by the newly released MoD files.

More fascinating research comes from Dave Armitage whose web site www.cumberlandspaceman.co.uk is well worth a look. He has scoured many obscure sources about the *Blue Streak* test programme and found that there were actually three Woomera *Blue Streak* launches that are relevant.

The first was scheduled for 25 May 1964, two days after the spaceman photo. This was abandoned due to bad weather.

The second launch was the one shown on the Pathé newsreel footage, from 5 June, and in which there is a glow visible to the left of the missile before and after take off. This is the sole basis of the 1996 parliamentary enquiry and is an apparent lens flare.

GETTY IMAGES / HULTON ARCHIVE / KEYSTONE

LEFT: A *Blue Streak* rocket being prepared for shipping to Australia in December 1963.

The launch was aborted after "a fault of an obscure nature"

But Armitage traced another launch – on 2 June – and cites a report by one of the scientists in charge. This launch was aborted three seconds from take off after a "fault of an obscure nature" was detected in the safety systems on the rocket and the control centre. None of this proves anything, as Armitage rightly concludes. But, as you can see, the puzzles keep proliferating. What was the explanation for the entity in Jim's photo? Or the light streak in the second one? What of the missing slides, or the alleged government interest for which no record has been found? And who were the two men who came to see Jim? If not from the government, then were they play-acting UFO enthusiasts, as ex-MoD man Nick Pope suggested to me? If so, they are persistent tricksters who crop up in several other cases over the years, but have avoided identification by the UFO community.

For instance, in October 1972, a couple from Manchester saw a landed UFO when crossing the Yorkshire moors near the Menwith Hill military communications station. On arriving home, they told me, they were greeted by police who apparently knew what had just happened and who quizzed the witnesses and then set up a press conference in the couple's home – very unusual behaviour! Then, I was amazed to hear that two men wearing dark suits and driving a big car had arrived at the conference, flashed identity cards and advised the couple not to talk to the press about their story – before sending reporters and police away. The two men quizzed the couple over and over (see **FT250:29**).

The pattern in these cases not only features the men in their car (often a Jaguar), but also unusual levels of involvement from police and cases with some kind of military or defence connection. I find that reason enough to wonder whether rogue UFO investigators are really the most likely answer – or could we be dealing with visitors from a military intelligence unit whose files are understandably *not* being released?

Finally, the latest batch of MoD files includes their response to my letter asking for an interview for my April 1996 BBC film (see last issue). I explained that I had received assistance from the Public Records Office and that both Nick Pope and Ralph Noyes, another ex-Ministry of Defence officer, had granted interviews about their time dealing with incoming UFO files. I understood Pope and Noyes might offer "a perspective that may well differ from your own" and asked "if you would be willing to express the current position of the MoD". I explained that I expected a "more cautious approach" and wanted this to balance my feature, and I offered a view of rushes in advance at the BBC.

The MoD declined my invitation, which was no surprise, but gave me a statement to read on air. However, the new MoD file contains a copy of a letter from someone further up the MoD chain (identity redacted) to the Air Staff office that answered my letter. This source writes: "Thank You. I can understand why sharing the screen with the precious Ralph and (name/words redacted) do not appeal to you." Another note enigmatically adds that "DPO later advised that (words redacted) was 'hopping mad' at our approach and failure to cooperate and wanted us to know that Mr Pope would be appearing and explaining what he used to do when he worked in Sec (AS) 2a."

I do wonder *who* was hopping mad and why they were not happy with the stance the MoD took. Perhaps, given that a few weeks later they faced a parliamentary enquiry as a direct result of the programme they had refused to assist, some form of karmic retribution was at work.

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WHEN THE LIG

In 1979, Colin Wilson travelled to Yorkshire to interview a family who had suffered a series of increasingly violent and disturbing phenomena in their semi-detached council house on a Pontefract estate. The entity behind the outbreak became known as 'the Black Monk of Pontefract' and as a new British film retells the story ALAN MURDIE looks back at one of the most dramatic poltergeist cases on record. Main photo by RANKIN.

One of the most remarkable British poltergeists of the 20th century was the 'Black Monk of Pontefract', which invaded a semi-detached house at 30 East Drive, on the Chequerfield Estate in Pontefract, Yorkshire, from 1966 to 1968. The bizarre manifestations were spread over three years, disrupting the lives of the residents, Jean and Joe Pritchard, and their two children, 15-year-old Philip and 12-year-old Diane. Going beyond noises and the simple movement of objects, the case featured the appearance of a hooded figure, which some believed to be the ghost of a monk from the local priory who had been executed for rape in the Middle Ages. Whatever its origins, this poltergeist remains one of the most peculiar cases on record, with the manifestations and their impact on the lives of the Pritchard family being investigated by Colin Wilson and detailed in his 1981 book *Poltergeist!* and now retold in a new British film called *When the Lights Went Out*.

Wilson was originally alerted to the case in 1979 by local historian Tom Cuniff, who had found reports of the story while researching the history of the Cluniac priory in Pontefract. The story was so extraordinary that Wilson travelled up to Yorkshire in 1980 to investigate further, visiting the house and interviewing members of the Pritchard family and their neighbours. Listening to their accounts, along with tape recordings of banging noises made at the time, not only convinced Wilson the case was genuine but led him to change his mind about the nature of the forces behind poltergeist manifestations.

"At that time, I believed poltergeists were somehow caused by the unconscious minds of emotionally disturbed teenagers… It was while the girl, Diane, was describing to me how she had been dragged upstairs by the throat by some invisible force, which left black bruises on her throat, that I realised this was not her unconscious mind. This was a 'Spirit'."[1]

PUDDLES OF WATER BEGAN FORMING ON THE KITCHEN FLOOR

It is easy to see why Wilson formed this opinion when the facts of the haunting are considered.

THE FIRST WAVE

The first signs of the poltergeist outbreak began in August 1966, when the Pritchards went away on a family holiday but left behind 15-year-old Philip with his grandmother, Mrs Sarah Scholes, at 30 East Drive.[2] The Pritchards had no reason to believe there would be any problems: their property was an ordinary council house with no previous history of hauntings.

However, this rapidly changed when both Philip and his grandmother experienced cold gusts of wind blowing through the house and shaking doors and windows despite it being a warm and sunny day. Shortly afterwards, a mysterious white powder began falling from the air in the lounge. Initially, neither Philip nor his grandmother jumped to the conclusion that there was a ghost in the house; but the puzzled Mrs Scholes called over her daughter, Marie Kelly, who lived nearby with her husband Vic. Soon after Mrs Kelly arrived, puddles of water began inexplicably appearing on the kitchen floor, and a greenish foam began emerging from taps.

The Water Board could find no explanation after checking the floors and drains. Then, in the evening, physical disturbances began in the house, with tea being sprinkled in the kitchen, a plant being uprooted from a pot and thrown downstairs, crockery in a cabinet vibrating and loud banging sounds. After checking neighbours were not creating the noises, Mrs Scholes called back Marie Kelly, whereupon the house became calm. Philip retired to bed, but when his grandmother looked in to say goodnight both were alarmed by the wardrobe moving by itself. They fled across the road to Marie and Vic's house for the night.

Meanwhile, the police came to examine the house, but found nothing untoward. Marie then called on a local ghost-hunter named Mr O'Donald, who came at once to inspect the property. He gave his opinion that teenagers such as Philip could be the focus of poltergeist activity, and in passing remarked to Vic and Marie that poltergeists often damaged photographs (the origin of this claim is obscure). They waited in the house until 1.45am but nothing seemed to be happening. Mr O'Donald left, but as Vic and Mary locked up they heard a crash. A wedding photograph had been slashed and thrown. This occurred when Philip – whom Mr O'Donald had identified as the likely focus – was absent from the property.

On returning home from their holiday the following Saturday, the Pritchards were understandably astonished by the tales of what had been happening in their absence. On enquiring what the noises were like, they were suddenly treated to

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HTS WENT OUT

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BIL BUNGAY

ABOVE: The semi-detached home of the Pritchard family at 30 East Drive, Pontefract, as it appears today. **BELOW:** Mrs Pritchard outside the house in 1981.

an example – three loud and unexplained bangs echoed through the house, followed by a cold draught which rattled the windows.

Those three knocks signified the departure of the poltergeist for two years.

MR NOBODY

In August 1968, as the second anniversary of the outbreak approached, the phenomena resumed. Philip had left school and was working, and his sister Diane, now a pretty 15-year-old, seemed to become the focus of activity, which soon dramatically eclipsed the first wave of two years before in both force and variety. The hammering and banging sounds returned on a nightly basis, accompanied by the lights being turned off and the movement and destruction of objects.

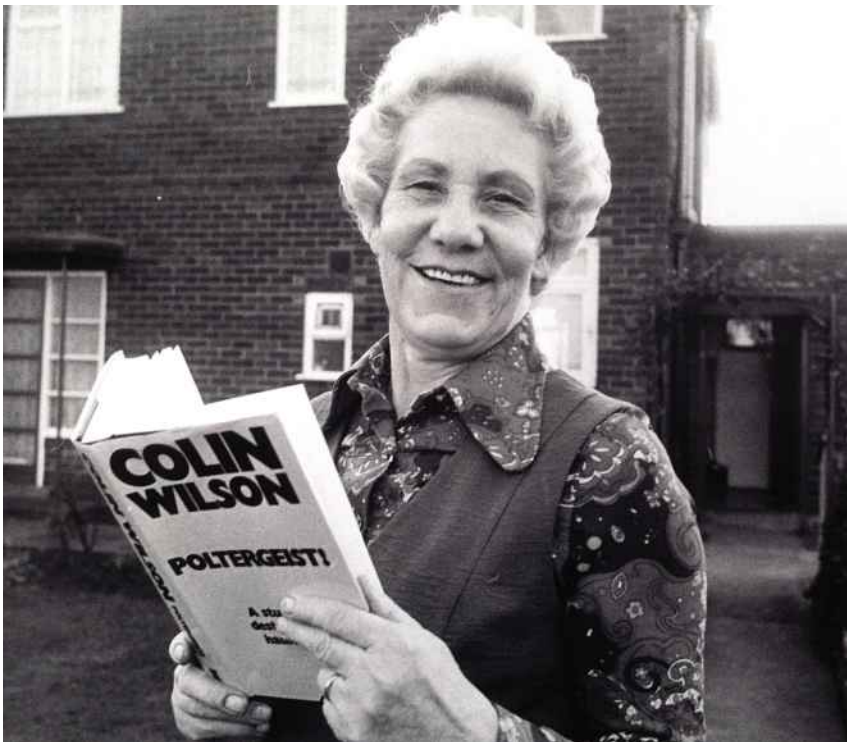
A Church of England priest, Rev. Davy, visited the house. After witnessing a candlestick fall from a mantle piece, he initially declared that such object movements were being caused by subsidence. He was hastily forced to revise his opinion when a second candlestick slowly floated from the shelf and dropped to the floor in front of him. This was followed by an enormous crashing sound and all the crockery from the dresser being dumped on the floor. Amazingly, not a single piece was broken. Now convinced that evil forces were at work, Rev. Davy's only advice was for the family to move.

Nonetheless, with commendable fortitude, the Pritchards stayed in their home as the manifestations developed in power and variety. The contents of bedrooms were thrown around as though raided by invisible burglars. A grandmother clock was thrown downstairs and smashed – seemingly prompted by a visit of the mayoress of Pontefract who casually remarked that the clock had remained untouched. As with the broken photo, it was as if something was acting on things that it had overheard.

Vic Kelly's sister Rene Holden – who had a reputation for being "a bit psychic" – was a witness to many of the phenomena, but her suggestion that they attempt to communicate with the presence at East Drive resulted only in further destructive displays rather than any insight into its motivation.

On occasion, pieces of furniture levitated, with one heavy item and a sewing machine pinning Diane down against the stairs. Fortunately, she was not physically hurt. Although the force used by the poltergeist was considerable, it did not seem to wish to physically harm anyone in the house, only to frighten and alarm.

Wilson describes in *Poltergeist!* how the presence showed a bizarre attraction



PONTEFRACT MUSEUM

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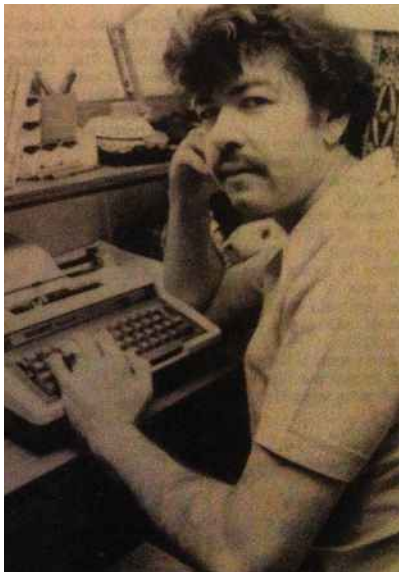
towards food, throwing eggs (which seemed to pass through solid obstacles and barriers) and one occasion leaving what resembled bite marks in a sandwich (which Mrs Holden tried unsuccessfully to preserve as a memento). More juvenile were antics such as emptying out the fridge and casting out a string of sausages. This occurred in the presence of another relative, Mrs Maude Peerce, a stalwart of the Salvation Army, who had a jug of milk poured over her. She accused the Pritchard children of playing tricks. However, she too was forced to revise this opinion when the poltergeist performed one of its most incredible manifestations – using her own fur gloves to improvise the appearance of a pair of hands from behind a partly opened door.

The gloves appeared widely separated, one moving around the top of the door frame, and the other around the bottom. The wide separation of the gloves gave the horrifying impression of a pair of hands belonging to a giant being lurking behind the door. Mrs Peerce shouted "Get away! You're evil" and threw a boot at the door. The gloves vanished only to reappear floating in the air before them, with one appearing first to beckon to the terrified onlookers, and then making a menacing fist. At this, Mrs Peerce burst into a chorus of the hymn "Onward Christian Soldiers" to repel the entity. The gloves then began moving as if to conduct her singing, beating time to the tune. The absurdity of this effect at least temporarily relieved the tension of the family, who became more amused than frightened by this performance. Mrs Peerce was not amused, and after the gloves were recovered she burned them, believing they were tainted with evil. Later, the poltergeist made a white coat disappear and it was found months later lying under the coal in the coal shed – yet completely clean.

A Catholic priest attempted what appears to have been a rather half-hearted exorcism; the result was more noises and damage to religious objects and images in the Pritchards' house. Over Easter, inverted crosses painted in gold appeared on doors, the poltergeist apparently daubing the symbols with paint that Philip used for his bicycle.



TOP: Local historian Tom Cunliff, who first researched the case. **ABOVE:** Colin Wilson.

Accounts of the haunting were picked up by the local press and the publicity brought crowds of interested and sensation-seeking individuals to camp outside in the hope of experiencing what had become almost nightly performances by the racket-making ghost. It seems many were not disappointed.[3] Less impressed were members of the now defunct Doncaster Psychical Research Group who, after a perfunctory investigation, accused Philip – without any proof – of fabricating the noises; their argument was based on a clear patch amongst the dust in the loft, which they alleged had been made by a loudspeaker.

PONTEFRACT MUSEUM

Animal and breathing sounds were added to the repertoire of noises, while the family were often too scared to investigate because of the poltergeist's habit of switching off the lights and leaving them in darkness. Mrs Pritchard took to keeping an electric torch with her but often she found the bulb or the batteries were mysteriously removed.

The poltergeist brought one unexpected benefit when the East Drive house underwent a dramatic drop in electricity usage, resulting in lower quarterly bills. The honest Mrs Pritchard reported the unexplained drop in usage to the Electricity Board, who acquitted her of any tampering. But the family suspected the poltergeist was turning back the meter.

More alarming were incidents when members of the household felt themselves pulled and thrown around by invisible hands. These responsive and interactive phenomena suggested that the presence was a distinct entity in its own right,

ABOVE: Tasha Connor as Sally Maynard (the Diane Pritchard character in *When the Lights Went Out*) contemplates the dark at the top of the stairs.

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BIL BUNGAY

BIL BUNGAY

ABOVE: The interior of the house at 30 East Drive as it appears today. Producer Bil Bungay found the property was for sale, and has since bought it.

which the Pritchards variously dubbed 'Mr Nobody' and 'Fred'. The presence focused its attention mostly on Diane, who suffered being thrown out of bed a dozen times with the mattress dumped on top of her. But her most terrifying moment came one evening when she was dragged up the stairs by an invisible force. A frantic tug-of-war began when Philip and Mrs Pritchard ran upstairs to try to rescue her. Suddenly, Diane was released and they all tumbled down the stairs in shock. When interviewed in 1980, everyone in the house confirmed Diane's terror and confusion. It was this incident that satisfied Wilson that the teenager's unconscious mind was not responsible and that a distinct entity was behind the phenomena.

BLACK MONK TIME

A new identity for 'Mr Nobody' was suggested when a monk-like apparition began to appear. A hooded figure was seen by both Mr and Mrs Pritchard simultaneously, then again by Diane and Philip together in the kitchen. Among other witnesses was their next-door neighbour Ms May Mountain who had also experienced violent drumming noises in her rooms (cracks in her ceiling were still visible when Wilson visited her in 1980). Mrs Mountain told Wilson one morning she had felt someone standing behind her in the kitchen. Looking round, she saw a tall figure in a black monk's habit. The face within the cowl was obscured but she felt no fear, only curiosity, until the form vanished. Another witness glimpsed what appeared to be a figure in a garment like a trailing dressing gown.

It was these features of the apparition which led to the case being dubbed the 'Black Monk of Pontefract' and the suggestion made that the Pritchards were being haunted by the black-robed ghost of one of the Cluniac order from Pontefract's former

ONE NIGHT, DIANE WAS DRAGGED UP THE STAIRS BY AN INVISIBLE FORCE

mediæval priory. A local tradition held that a monk from Pontefract Priory had been hanged for rape in the Middle Ages and that the house stood near the site of an old gallows. This encouraged speculation that the spirit of the guilty monk was targeting Diane Pritchard, turning her into the victim of a sexual stalker from beyond the grave. However, an extensive study of historical records failed to turn up any evidence for a monk from the Priory ever being executed for a sex crime. As with so many alleged entities manifesting in haunted houses or at séances, no corroboration could be discovered for any independent existence in the historical past.

Finally, the Pritchards resorted to a tactic derived from vampire films and hung garlic in the house – clearly they had reached a point of desperation and were willing to attempt anything. Following a few more token efforts, the Black Monk seems thereafter to have abandoned its assaults permanently, although it may be that the poltergeist had simply reached the end of its natural duration.

As Wilson says of the Black Monk of Pontefract, "The strange thing is that remarkable case was never officially investigated – or even recorded – and that it came so close to being forgotten." This is not completely true: it was logged as one of some 109 hauntings occurring in the British Isles in 1968 by the Paraphysical Laboratory at Downton, Wiltshire, but no action was taken.[4] As a result, it was not until Wilson investigated the case that anything approaching a proper study was made of its extraordinary features.

Astonishing as the details collected by Wilson are, many of the incidents have precedents in poltergeist literature. Pools of water;[5] three knocks marking the departure of the poltergeist;[6] damage to religious objects;[7] levitations of heavy furniture;[8] the uprooting of plants;[9] physical assaults suggesting an external entity;[10] and electrical anomalies[11] have all featured in poltergeist cases, though rarely occurring in such dramatic combination. Even the start of events in late August is not without precedent – manifestations began in the Enfield poltergeist case on 31 August 1977.[12]

It should be noted that the Black Monk of Pontefract is also not the only case in which monk-like apparitions have featured. The same year as the Pontefract manifestations commenced, a book was published in West Germany detailing the fantastic 19th-century story of the 'Maid of Orlach' who was believed to be possessed by spirits amid what are now recognisable as poltergeist manifestations.[13] Rosina Magdalena Gronbach of Orlach, Württemberg, was a young peasant girl whose adventures began in 1831 in a cow shed where a recently bought cow was found to have been moved and the folkloric knotting of tails (usually associated with horses) began to occur.

Mysterious fires soon followed and it was not long before the girl became possessed by two spirits – a white one and a black one in the form of a monk who became visible to her. A strange voice began to manifest through the girl, with the black spirit

continued on p37…

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SHOOTING THE LIGHTS OUT

AN INTERVIEW WITH PAT HOLDEN AND BIL BUNGAY

Director **PAT HOLDEN**'s mother was one of the key witnesses to the events at 30 East Drive, Pontefract. Now, with producer **BIL BUNGAY**, Pat has brought the story of the Black Monk of Pontefract to the screen. *FT* talked to them about family history, paranormal activity and economic horror. Film stills by **JO IRVINE**.

FT: How did *When The Lights Went Out* come about?

PAT HOLDEN: I've wanted to make a film about the 'Black Monk of Pontefract' ever since I was a kid. As you know, it's a very personal story for me because it involved my aunt [Jean Pritchard], whose home was the target of the haunting, and my mother [Rene Holden], who experienced it at first hand many times.

The haunting took place in a nice, average northern council house – 30 East Drive, Pontefract, to be precise – and happened to a normal, working class family. It's recognised as one of the most violent of all poltergeist hauntings. Many people experienced it at first hand – the police, neighbours, relatives, priests and even the local mayor. One thing I have never questioned about it is its authenticity. What makes it a great subject for a film is that it's about an extraordinary thing that happened to such ordinary people, in such an ordinary place. I've always found that fascinating.

BIL BUNGAY: Yes, that's it. When Pat first told me the story, it wasn't just the incredible events that caught my attention, but the fact that it was a family story – his mother actually saw these things happen on a regular basis. It must have been the subject of many a dinnertime conversation in the Holden household! Having sat and listened to Pat's stories for many hours, I vowed that one day we'd turn it into a film. I just didn't realise that it would take us the best part of 20 years to get the project off the ground.

FT: What was the inspiration for the title *When The Lights Went Out*?

BB: Even though the actual haunting lasted for years, we chose to telescope events into one year and move them to 1974 – for the simple reason that 1974 was an era of stagflation and so it's almost identical to the economic situation we are living in now. It was a time when there was political uncertainty, strikes, business closures, massive job losses.

And, of course, there were power cuts every night – which for this one family in Pontefract (whose lights often went off even when there *was* power in the grid) meant having to deal with a whole lot more than finding the candles.

It's a simple story about a family's struggle against an invisible force that threatens them as a family unit. You could see it as a metaphor for the credit crunch – something that's taking away jobs and threatening livelihoods, and thus the stability of family units all over the country. 2012 is 1974 all over again. So, hopefully, *When The Lights Went Out* should feel relevant to its audience despite it being based on events that happened 40 years ago.

Pat Holden and Bil Bungay

CHRIS BRETZ

Tasha Connor as the haunted Sally Maynard

FT: The Pontefract poltergeist demonstrated an unusually broad range of phenomena – did you manage to get most of the things it did into the film? And how closely did you stick to the actual events?

PH: It did a lot of scary and occasionally unique things: levitating stuff, making noises, touching people, freezing rooms, turning off lights… Perhaps the scariest thing it did was drag Diane Pritchard – Sally Maynard in our film – up a flight of stairs. We got most of it into the film, along with versions of most of the real characters. Overall, I'd say we stuck fairly close to the real events, although I've had to make some changes, as you'd expect for a narrative film aimed at a wide audience.

BB: The ending is the main departure from the original story. Poltergeists usually just seem to stop their activities eventually. That doesn't really make for an edge-of-your-seat climax, so we had to embellish the ending a little.

FT: It must be a bit odd having your own mother as a character in the film. Colin Wilson mentions that she was known to be "a bit psychic". What exactly does that mean?

PH: Yes, my mother is 'Rita' in the film, played brilliantly by Andrea Lowe. In real life, she did have something of a name as a local psychic and read tea leaves and cards for people. She always seemed to be uncannily accurate in what she came up with. She even contacted the police saying the Yorkshire Ripper was a lorry driver, years before they actually got Peter Sutcliffe.

FT: Did you ever visit the house with her when the poltergeist was in residence?

PH: No. I wasn't allowed anywhere near the house until it was long gone.

FT: Have either of you ever had

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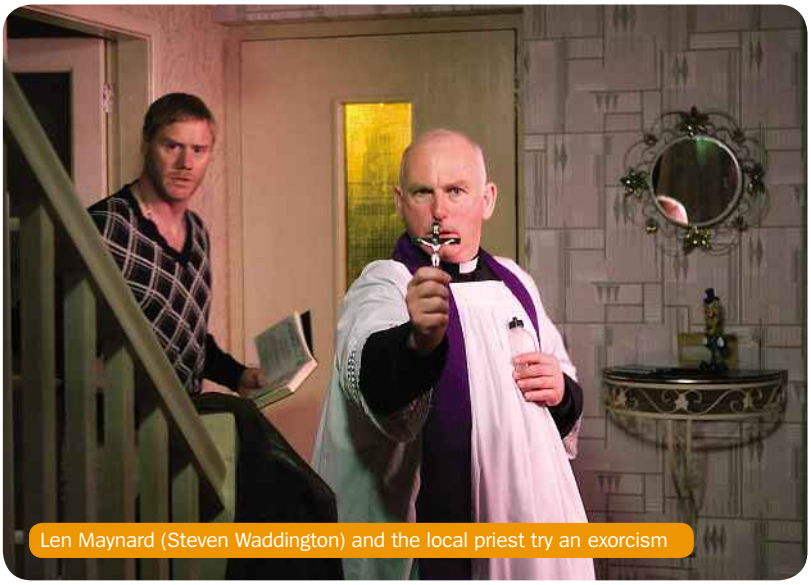
a personal experience of the kind the film explores?

BB: The truth is, when Pat was telling me about the Pontefract Poltergeist all those years ago, I'm not sure I totally bought the story. However, in the course of preparing for *When The Lights Went Out*, I did quite a bit of research and also had the privilege of being invited to a house in Holbrooks, Coventry, that had an actual living, breathing, howling, banging, object-throwing, door-slamming, happy-slapping, animal-hurting beast of a poltergeist in it. I left the Coventry house that day with a very different perspective on poltergeists. Now, I have absolutely no doubt that these things are very real and terrifying. But *what* they are is a completely different matter.



Len Maynard (Steven Waddington) and the local priest try an exorcism

FT: What do you think a poltergeist is?

PH: A manifestation of pain within a family.

BB: I want to agree, as both the Pontefract and Coventry families had surprisingly similar backgrounds and circumstances on many levels: working class, council house, adolescent girl in residence, tension in the house and so on – but I can't help but feel that both families' homes were targeted by an entity that was *beyond* the family. I've heard it suggested that water – underground springs, for example; which were certainly there in the case of the Pontefract location – can act as a catalyst for such manifestations too. Lisa, the mother from the family in the Coventry manifestation, described seeing a creature standing in the upstairs window of her house after they had fled a particularly violent episode. She saw this thing with her own eyes and described it as "seven to eight feet [2–2.4m] tall, not human, more like an animal".

I believe that a poltergeist could be some extraordinary psychokinetic event, and, if so, science should be all over this. But, sadly, science seems to have concluded a long time ago that ghosts are for kooks.

Mind you, having said that, in the case of the Coventry poltergeist it's worth mentioning that one element differed greatly from the generally accepted view that in the vicinity of every poltergeist manifestation is a troubled adolescent girl. In this case, the previous family who lived in the house moved out in the middle of the night leaving everything behind, and the old lady who lived there before them complained of being hounded by something unseen. So, if that is a psychokinetic event, it's a complex one, as it would appear that is isn't connected to any single individual. Plus Ellie, Lisa's daughter, is a bright and gentle 11-year-old, not in any way the troubled youth you'd assume.

FT: Is the family still living there?

BB: Lisa moved the family out to her mother's house and then on to a temporary house because the poltergeist living there is too violent. It has actually broken the back legs of two of the family dogs, both of which had to be put down. Perhaps what's even more extraordinary is that not only did the council refuse to move her and her kids out – on the basis that 'hauntings' are not on their list of priorities – but that as soon as Lisa took her family out of there they moved another family in.

Perfect 1970s set dressing...

FT: And have they experienced anything strange?

BB: Absolutely. A disbelieving neighbour of Lisa's saw toothbrushes floating outside of the upstairs window and knocked on the door to tell the new family what she saw with her own eyes. She has since apologised to Lisa for refusing to believe her. I hope the family are doing ok. They're the second family to live in the house since Lisa moved out, and the fifth in 18 months. It was Lisa's dream home. An end-of-terrace house with a large garden for the kids and pets to play in – she didn't want to move.

I suppose what I am trying to say – and to pre-empt the accusation – is that what happened to Lisa and her children was definitely not a cry for help on Lisa's part. She was very happy there initially, until she was hounded out of the house by this entity. The fire pit at the bottom of her garden said it all for me; there was this working class family that could barely afford to feed and clothe themselves taking out everything – from ornaments, to cupboard doors, from mattresses, to favourite toys – and burning it. Anything that the poltergeist touched basically: torched.

The similarities between Lisa's poltergeist and the Pontefract events are startling: council house, working class family, the pools of water, objects being thrown, people being shoved and slapped, the occasional extreme violence. But, in fairness to the Pontefract family, part of the charm is their stoicism; they refused to be hounded out of their home and instead gave 'it' a name – "Fred" – and lived with it for years. I think that is incredible.

FT: Bil, you told me a few weeks

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ago about something odd that happened quite recently…

BB: Yes, we did have a very weird thing happen during a distributor viewing. Getting distributors together to see your movie is about the most important bit of the process, because if they don't see it you can't sell it, which basically means you are dead in the water, money wasted, game over. So you don't mess with these people.

We had organised a viewing at a screening room in Soho and about 30 or more of these precious individuals turned up, which was incredible, really. The lights went out and they all settled down to watch a movie called *When The Lights Went Out*. Twenty minutes into the viewing, there was a total power failure – but *only to that room*! The rest of the screening house was fine, but that room was in total darkness – no lights, no projector, nothing – so we had to abandon the screening.

But it doesn't end there. We arranged a second screening for the following morning, on a different screen, and a reduced number of distributors returned for a second attempt. And guess what? The same bloody thing happened! Total power failure to the screening room they were all in. And once again, it was only that screen…

An attempt to communicate with the poltergeist

FT: I still have a suspicion that you set this up.

BB: No! I swear to you I had nothing to do with it! I actually wasn't even at those screenings – they were organised by our sales agents. Seriously spooky… We finally had a successful viewing for the few distributors that dared come back at a totally different screening house.

FT: Your background is marketing, isn't it Bil? Will you be involved in promoting the film?

BB: Oh, absolutely. I intend to make this the most discussed movie in the UK! It doesn't have any big stars, which I believe is right for this story. It's all about the authentic delivery of the plot – the accents are true, the 70s styling is incredible… but that does make it trickier to promote, as that's the way the movie industry usually works, focusing on stars…

FT: The poster image – which we're very happy to be featuring on this issue's cover – should help… it's striking, to say the least.

BB: Yes, it's by Rankin! He came to see a preview of the movie a while back and offered to apply his talents to the poster. Tasha Connor – who is just wonderful as Sally – looks both haunted and beautiful. It's a brilliant image, and it really hints at how violent the events became.

But, what I was going to say was… I do now have a big star to promote the film! Last month, I was up in Pontefract and took the opportunity to visit the house at 30 East Drive. I got there and, believe it or not, the place was for sale. So I bought it!

Now I have a star! The real star of the film! We're running a national competition to find two people to go to the Red Carpet Premiere of the movie in the house, on their own – to watch the movie about events that happened in that actual house! We'll definitely need to webcam them – you know, Infrared, green eyes – and watch their reactions!

I can't guarantee that there's a poltergeist there any more… but I can't guarantee that there isn't.

When the Lights Went Out goes on general UK release on 14 September.

Ghost tours at the haunted house

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PICK OF THE POLTS

The Pontefract Poltergeist is not the only one to resist easy explanation or debunking. Here are eight more classic cases to challenge the sceptics.

Thornton Heath, Croydon, England, 1938

Well-witnessed case, involving strange phenomena centring on an adult woman and eventually linked with a sexual trauma during childhood. Researched by the American investigator Dr Nandor Fodor, this case interested Sigmund Freud, by then living in London. Because of the sensitive and controversial nature of the sexual theories, the research was discouraged and eventually stopped by one research body and details were not published until nearly 20 years afterwards.

See: Nandor Fodor: "The Haunting at Thornton Heath", *Tomorrow* 5:2, winter 1957; Nandor Fodor: *On the Trail of the Poltergeist*, 1960.

Hannath Hall, Wisbech, Cambridgeshire, England, 1957

Poltergeist phenomena occurred at the home of Derek Page MP and were witnessed by investigators Tony Cornell and Dr Alan Gauld, who heard raps and encountered object movements. Reported in the *Journal of the SPR* (1960) and the book *Poltergeists* (1979) by the researchers.

See: AD Cornell & Alan Gauld: "A Fenland Poltergeist", *Jnl SPR* 40:705, Sept 1960.

Sauchie, Scotland, 1960

Phenomena centred on a 14-year-old girl, Virginia. Investigated by Dr George Owen, who was impressed by the quality of the witnesses and later wrote the book *Can We Explain the Poltergeist?* (1964). Rapping noises were recorded by the BBC. An analysis of the sound recording some 50 years later by Dr Barrie Colvin reveals an acoustical pattern only so far identified in poltergeist cases.

See: ARG Owen: "The Sauchie Poltergeist of 1960", *Tomorrow* 10:2, spring 1962; ARG Owen: *Can We Explain The Poltergeist?*, 1964.

Miami, Florida, USA, 1967

Well-documented and researched case occurring at a warehouse in Miami, Florida, in 1967, focusing on a 19-year-old male employee. Extensively detailed in books by William Roll and generating some interesting data and theories. It was noted that movements occurred in a short, radial and clockwise direction close to the agent and in a long, tangential and counter-clockwise manner when separated from him by a considerable distance, resembling a beam of energy produced by two transmitters.

See: William G Roll, Donald S Burdick & William T Jones: "Radial and Tangential Forces in the Miami Poltergeist", *Research in Parapsychology 1972: Abstracts and Papers from the 15th Annual Convention of the Parapsychological Association*.

Rosenheim, Bavaria, Germany, 1967

Investigated by scientists and perhaps the best-witnessed case of modern times. Poltergeist phenomena disturbed a lawyer's office in Rosenheim, Bavaria (left). Electrical anomalies included telephone calls made to the speaking clock at a rate faster than any human could dial. Investigated by Dr Hans Bender and the University of Freiburg physics department. Phenomena captured on video included swinging lights and a rotating clock. An attack on the researchers mounted by a sceptical journalist led to a court case in 1971 in which the investigators were awarded compensation. The case was re-examined for the BBC television series *A Leap in the Dark* (1975), which corroborated events and tracked down the young woman who had been the focus of the phenomena.

See: Hans Bender: "New Developments in Poltergeist Research", *Proceedings of the Parapsychological Association* 6, 1969; Hans Bender: "Modern Poltergeist Research – A Plea for an Unprejudiced View" in John Beloff (ed): *New Directions in Parapsychology*, 1974.

Olive Hill, Kentucky, USA, 1968

Phenomena witnessed in a domestic dwelling by two parapsychologists who saw objects start to move. Tables and a cabinet were moved, leading investigator William Roll to wonder if once an object has been moved it is more likely to be moved again, making it suitable to be a control.

TOPFOTO.CO.UK / FORTEAN PICTURE LIBRARY / HART-DAVIS

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See: William G Roll: *The Poltergeist*, 1977; William G Roll: "Earlier RSPK cases", *Research in Parapsychology 1974: Abstracts and Papers from the Seventeenth Annual Convention of the Parapsychological Association*.

Enfield, London, England, 1977–78

Lengthy and controversial poltergeist case which occurred in the home of a single mother and her teenage children (opposite, top). Investigated by Guy Lyon Playfair and the late Maurice Grosse, who wrote a book on the case. Enfield featured a mysterious gruff voice produced by the 'false vocal chords' of an 11-year-old girl. Despite an offer of £1,000 reward, no one has managed to replicate the voice under similar conditions. Attacked by sceptics, the authors took successful legal actions to defend their reputations. In October 1987, the case was attacked by Nicholas Humphreys in a Channel 4 TV programme on British television, but Humphreys declined to take part in a *Right to Reply* programme the following week which brought in Maurice Grosse to answer the criticisms. Although the case has been subject to much criticism from authors approaching it from secondary sources, the 200-page re-examination conducted by the Society for Psychical Research has been ignored or misquoted. Since 2007, only one critic of the case has actually examined the evidence held in the SPR archive. This is Dr Melvyn Willin, who announced in May 2009 that he had changed his mind and was now satisfied that trickery was inadequate as an explanation.

See: Maurice Grosse & Guy Lyon Playfair: *This House is Haunted*, 1980; 2009.

South Shields, Tyneside, England, 2006

Case occurring in a private house in South Shields,Tyneside, England. Witnessed and researched by Mike Hallowell and Darren Ritson. The authors had the good fortune of being alerted to events at an early stage, with numerous alleged paranormal incidents going far beyond the usual poltergeist repertoire of raps, object movements and levitations. Phenomena included physical assaults and scratches inflicted on one resident, and examples of matter-through-matter penetration. Most remarkable of all were apparent attempts at communication from the poltergeist, suggesting a rudimentary and malevolent intelligence at work. At least a dozen reliable witnesses. Numerous photographs and recordings made at the location await further analysis.

See: Michael J Hallowell & Darren W Ritson: *The South Shields Poltergeist*, 2010.

... continued from p32

pretending he controlled her, calling her vile names and pouring out abuse against her. When the black spirit appeared, she described it as if coming from a dark cloudy formation, and when possession took place she described a cold hand which seized her neck. This was described by one commentator in sensational terms:

The black spirit subjected her to more and more violent temptations... he made himself master of her whole interior. He entered into her and uttered by her mouth demoniac discourses. The spirit [of a black monk] appears to her sometimes in human shape coming towards her. Then she hears a few brief words: "Won't you give me an answer? I shall torment you." Remaining silent the maid next hears the words: "Well, I shall enter into you..."... She loses her individuality; feels she is no longer present in her own body; she speaks with a bass voice in the person of the monk, through her own lips – diabolically distorted.[14]

It was claimed that manifestations were attempting to draw attention to crimes committed on the site in which young nuns had been seduced and the resulting babies murdered, with the bones thrown into a pit to rot. The white spirit said that Magdalena's sufferings would only end if her parents' house were to be demolished. Very obligingly, her mother and father declared this would be done, and the house was duly pulled down. In 1833, the last wall collapsed revealing a hole in which bones were found and almost from that moment the possession of Magdalena ceased and she returned to normal.

It seems improbable that this obscure story, published in German in 1966, could have been an inspiration for the Pontefract case. More recently, a second poltergeist case involving a phantom monk has been reported from North Wales. This was the 'Brother Doli case' reported by the Society for Psychical Research in 2002 and which occurred in a middle-class household at Mold. Unexplained stains and carvings of images and Welsh words were found discovered inside and outside the house. Sounds of footsteps, bangs and crashes, strange smells, pools of water, temperature variations, electrical anomalies and object movements were reported by the family concerned. Photographs taken at the property showed unexplained monk-like shapes, with the household giving the name 'Brother Doli' to the presence. An investigation by Michael Daniels failed to resolve whether the reports were "the result of an elaborate hoax, or whether there is a mixture of genuine and fabricated incidents".[15]

Looking back at the 'Black Monk' case, it's easy to see why Colin Wilson concluded that a rudimentary and somewhat malevolent external intelligence was at work in Pontefract, even if ultimately its main intention seemed to be to frighten rather than inflict actual physical harm. The responsive nature of the phenomena and the apparition certainly gave the impression of a discarnate entity. Perhaps few parapsychologists will share Wilson's views, and attempts to distinguish between poltergeists attributable to the unconscious mind and those suggestive of discarnate spirits have not been notably successful.[16] But given that we have no adequate scientific model to explain the workings of human consciousness, Wilson's views deserve consideration, and we should certainly be cautious of dismissing the Black Monk of Pontefract as being a case of "all in the mind". FT

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

A barrister and a keen investigator of paranormal claims, **ALAN MURDIE** is chairman of the Ghost Club, author of books in the *Haunted* series and co-author of *The Cambridge Ghost Book*.

NOTES

1 Colin Wilson: *D.Mail,* 9 Jun 2000; Lecture to the Society for Psychical Research, 18 Jun 1992. For a detailed account of the case see: Colin Wilson: *Poltergeist! A Study in Destructive Haunting*, New English Library, 1981.

2 There is a minor date discrepancy in Wilson's book; the text identifies the August Bank holiday week 1966, though the dust jacket of the paperback 1985 edition claims events began on "Thursday June 1st 1966".

3 *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 11 Sept 1968.

4 *Journal of Paraphysics,* Spontaneous Directory 1968.

5 The Enfield Poltergeist is the subject of *This House is Haunted* (1980, 2009) by Maurice Grosse & Guy Lyon Playfair.

6 Case at Great Cornard, Suffolk, 1971 – personal communication by the late Mick Brooks to Alan Murdie, 24 Dec 1977.

7 See for example the Pillay case in India in 1926 cited in D Scott Rogo: *The Poltergeist Experience*, 1979.

8 The Gorefield Poltergeist, Cambridgeshire, England, 1923, noted in Charles Fort: *Wild Talents*, 1931.

9 See Alan Gauld & Tony Cornell: *Poltergeists*, 1979.

10 See Harry Price: *Poltergeist Over England*, 1945.

11 See Michael J Hallowell & Darren W Ritson: *The South Shields Poltergeist : One Family's Fight Against An Invisible Intruder*, 2008.

12 See note 5 above.

13 Heino Gehrts: *Das Madchen Von Orlach*, Stuttgart, 1966.

14 Quoted in Tony Finlay: *Exorcism – The Hidden Truth*; http://bit.ly/RJBstT (tonyfinlay.co.uk).

15 The Brother Doli Case: see Michael Daniels: "Investigation Of Apparent Poltergeist-Type Manifestations In North Wales", *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* Vol 66.3, No. 869, 2002, 193–221.See also **FT113:26–27**, **122:50**, **128:53**, **151:54**, **158:53**, **217:75**.

16 See, for example, Ian Stevenson: "Are Poltergeists Living or Are They Dead?", *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research* 66, 1972, pp233–52.

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The Birth of the Poltergeist

CLAUDE LECOUTEUX explores the way in which, over the course of the 16th century, with its religious disputes and obsession with the supernatural, a whole family of noisy spirits, devilish entities and mischievous dwarfs eventually came to be subsumed under the familiar name of the poltergeist.

A SIXTEENTH-CENTURY SPIRIT

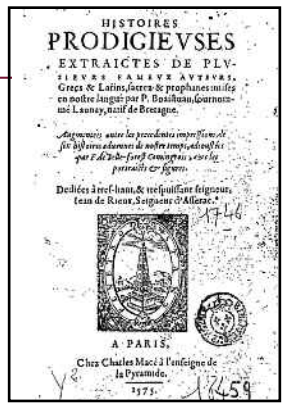
According to the *Collins English Dictionary*, "poltergeist" is defined as follows: "A spirit believed to be responsible for noises and acts of mischief, such as throwing objects about." *Longman's Dictionary of the English Language* offers an almost identical definition: "A noisy spirit, generally wicked, believed to be responsible for unexplained noises and physical damage." The *Harrap's New Standard French-English Dictionary* offers "*esprit frappeur*", or "knocking spirit".

The name that designates the knocking spirits of today first appeared in the 16th century. To understand how a new concept can suddenly emerge, it is necessary to take a look at the cultural environment surrounding its genesis. A word is created in response to a need to express an idea or fact in some adequate way.

It is certainly not by chance that our word appeared in the middle of the 16th century, profoundly marked as it was by the Reformation and the polemic that ensued for many long years between Catholics and Protestants. This was a century likewise marked by an extraordinary resurgence of the irrational and superstitious. The people of this era shared a huge passion for spirits, demons, spectres, magic and witchcraft, as well as marvels and monstrous births, which were always regarded as signs heralding catastrophes.

A listing of some of the books printed during this time reveals this infatuation with the supernatural. 1557: Conrad Lycosthènes's *Prodigiorum ac ostentorum chronicon* (Chronicle of Portents and Omens); 1560: Pierre Boaistuau's *Histoires prodigieuses* (Miraculous Stories); 1564: Johann Weyer's *De præstigiis dæmonum* (On the Illusions of Demons, 1564); 1569: Ludwig Lavater's *Of Ghosts and Spirits Walking by Night and Great and Unaccustomed Noises and Various Presages* and theologian Pierre Nodé's *Discourse against the Execrable Error of Evil Spell-casters, Witches, Enchanters, Magicians, Seers and Similar Observers of Superstitions*; 1570 saw Claude de Tesserand add several chapters to Boaistuau's *Miraculous Stories*, dealing with spectres and demons, and around 1580, François de Belleforest expanded it with another 15 chapters. Among other things, he discussed a phantom that pulled the covers off sleeping victims and a procession of ghosts; 1586: Pierre Le Loyer's *Discourse des spectres ou Visions et apparitions d'esprits* ("Discourse on Ghosts or Visions and Apparitions of Spirits"); 1588: Noël Taillepied's *Psichologie ou Traité de l'Apparition des Esprits* ("Psychology or Treatise on the Apparition of Spirits"); 1590: Prior Pierre Crespet's *Deux livres de la hargne de Sathan et malin esprits contre l'homme* ("Two Books on the Spite of Satan and Evil Spirits against Man"); 1594: Thomas Nash's *Terrors of the Night or A Discourse of Apparitions*, in which he criticised certain beliefs he deemed to be "old wives' tales"; 1596: the Jesuit Petrus Thyraeus's *Dæmoniaci, hoc est, de obsessis a spiritibus dæmoniorum hominibus* ("Demon Possession, that is, of Men Possessed by Demonic Spirits"), which dealt with the spirits of the deceased and persecuting demons as well as "the commotions that customarily herald the deaths of men". In the last years of the century, King James VI of Scotland (later James I of England) (1566–1625) finished his *Dæmonologie, in Forme of a Dialogue*, the third book of which is devoted to spirits that manifest themselves and which are really devils.

> THERE WAS A PHANTOM THAT PULLED THE COVERS OFF SLEEPING VICTIMS



The debate on the nature of spirits and demons continued through the 17th century, but it would be an exhausting task to list every text on spirits that appeared from 1550 to around 1700. It is worth noting that

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their authors were scholars, learned men, and theologians. Each was fully capable of observing that the problem of demons, ghosts and other unusual manifestations was one of the major concerns of the day, and from this it is easy to understand why a new name emerged, a term that responded to the need to precisely define a phenomenon that had become a topic of great interest.

LUTHER AND THE DEVIL

The term *poltergeist* first appeared in the 16th century, initially in the dictionary published by Erasmus Alberus in 1540, and then in the *Tischreden* (*Table Talk*, 1566) of Martin Luther. It is obvious that when a word enters a dictionary it is because it already has a life and its usage is spreading but has not yet been "canonised", so to speak. We can, therefore, gather that the term already existed at the end of the 15th century. It was first written as two words, *polter geyst*, and then as one word once the meaning was established. The term is composed from the root of the verb *poltern*, "to make noise", "to tap", and *Geist*, "spirit", which can designate both the Devil and demons as well as ghosts and other beings from folk belief. In general, *Geist*, "spirit", is used as a default term – in other words, when uncertainty reigns and people are not entirely sure just what it is they are dealing with. This indeterminacy is the source of the conflations of different entities. The interpretation is a result of the knowledge, beliefs, and superstitions of the witnesses, and – first and foremost – of tradition.

For Luther, the term *poltergeist* essentially designated phenomena attributed to the Devil, assaults, and supernatural noises. The great reformer mentions these manifestations on several occasions. The first was in response to a priest who had come seeking his advice when he was harassed by a spirit of this nature that manifested itself by making all sorts of noises and by throwing and breaking a good number of objects:

"A priest of Süpz, living near Thorgau, sought Luther while complaining that the Devil was causing a din (poltern), a fracas, in his house at night, striking him, and throwing objects with such force that all his plates and wooden containers had been broken, and never giving him a moment's peace. Indeed, he cast pots and plates at his head, which, shattering into pieces, caused him distress. What's more he mocked at him. More than once he had heard the Devil laugh but never caught sight of him. This game and these manifestations had gone on for a year, and his wife and children no longer wished to stay home but set up house in the field." [1]

For Luther, this was a devilish illusion that could be dispelled by prayer. In a chapter of *Table Talk* entitled "The Polter Geysts", Luther reacts to the opinion voiced one day by Nuremberg theologian Andreas Oisader, when dining together, that knocking spirits did not exist. Luther refuted this claim with the help of four personal anecdotes:

"They exist! Oisander always wants to have it his way. I have observed their existence propria experencia *(through personal experience), one day when I was weary from reciting my canonical prayers, a loud noise erupted from behind the stove, which terrified me greatly. But when I realized that it was the Devil's play I went to bed and prayed to God, saying,* 'Tu omnia subiecisti sub pedibus eius, scilicet Filii tui.' *(If the Devil has any power over me, let him show it!) And I went to sleep.*

"Another time, when I was in the refectory, such a loud din of clattering plates erupted, I thought both heaven and earth must be crumbling to pieces, but I soon realized it was the Devil at work, at which point I retired and went to sleep.

"A third time I glanced into the garden from the window of my cell after leaving Mass. I then saw a large black sow racing about in every direction although it was impossible for any sow to gain entrance to it. She soon vanished; she, too, was the Devil.

"The fourth time occurred when I was in Wartburg near Eisenach, and someone was throwing hazelnuts at me from behind the stove. I soon saw this, too, was the work of the Devil, so I went to bed. I personally experienced all this. Haec vera sunt." [2]

Asseruit Christum divina Voce LVTHERVS,
Cultibus oppressam restituitque fidem.
Illius absentis vultum hec depingit Imago,
Presentem melius cernere nemo potest.
MARTINVS LVTHERVS. 1540.

GETTY IMAGES / HULTON ARCHIVE

DEVIL'S WORK: Martin Luther, the rebel priest who began the Reformation, was pelted with hazelnuts.

It will be noted that all these manifestations are attributed to the Devil, which is strengthened by the provenance of the noises from behind the stove in case one and four – a place that in Renaissance-era German was called "hell" (*Helle*).

This is the context of the first attestations of the word *poltergeist*. Etymologically, the term has two translations. The first is "noisy haunting", therefore a primarily acoustic phenomenon. We should note that the verb *geistern*, which is derived from *Geist*, means "to haunt" and leaves the trouble of designating the cause of the manifestation up to the individual. The second translation is "rapping spirit", which adds a definite supernatural dimension.

THE MEANING OF A WORD

Other words that are built upon the etymon *polter* help us to grasp the primary meaning of the term. *Polterkammer* (18th century) is the word for the "garret", the "junk room", but translated literally means "the room of the commotion", and it is here where the household spirit generally hides. A *Polterhammer* is the "planishing hammer

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or mallet" used by boilermakers, and everyone knows that their activity is rather noisy! Finally we have *Polterabend*, which appeared in German between 1517 and 1534 and designates a custom taking place on the eve of a wedding and that is sometimes translated as "charivari" although there is a notable difference between the two concepts. The guests at the festivities throw and break old dishes in front of the windows or the doors of the future newlyweds' homes, which is supposed to bring them luck and happiness, whereas the French or Norwegian *charivari* is intended as a noisy condemnation of an inappropriate marriage. German linguists have theorised that *Polterabend* is a contraction of *Poltergeistabend*, "the evening of the knocking spirit", and the behaviour of the guests was intended to drive away this kind of spirit and misfortune. It is common knowledge, in fact, that a loud racket is a means of supernatural defence. We have multiple examples of this, from ancient Rome when, during the Lemuria – a time when the dead returned – the *Pater familias* would walk through the house banging a bronze vase, to modern times when bells are rung to send the demons of bad weather fleeing. While such contractions were common during the Middle Ages, this hypothesis seems quite unlikely to me, first, because I know of no other instance when *geist* vanished from a polysyllable and, second, because the term *geist* itself possesses a strong semantic charge. Whatever the case may be, the actions described are characterised by loud noises: a true hubbub.

From 1568 on, the attested occurrences of this word multiplied. It can be found in Fischart's 1591 German translation of Bodin's *De la démonomanie des sorciers*, ("On the Demon Worship of Sorcerers") in Georg Rollenhagen's mock epic poem *Der Froschmeusler* published in Magdeburg in 1595, in Stieler's book on the German language published in 1691, and so forth.

In the 16th and 17th centuries, *poltergeist* had another meaning that seems deeply rooted in the popular mindset. In 1666, Johannes Prætorius spoke about knocking spirits and provided a description that is incredibly reminiscent of dwarfs: "The ancients could only believe that poltergeists had to be veritable human beings, who looked like small children and wore little robes or multicoloured garb… Superstitious folk think they are the souls of people murdered in their houses earlier." [3]

While these two senses for the term *poltergeist* were generally accepted during the 16th and 17th centuries, a further one has been added since the founding of Spiritualism in 1852, which was brought about by the famous poltergeist phenomena that took place in Hydesville, New York (**FT179:14**; **205:39**; **270:74**). The Fox family had been disturbed by rapping noises and moving furniture, which continued over a period of time. It was discovered that the two daughters of the couple were mediums. Thus, when this type of manifestation can be attributed to an identifiable living person, parapsychologists classify the *poltergeist* as a phenomenon of psychokinesis, a term designating the action of mind over matter. It is still customary, however, to use the term *poltergeist* whenever the process is triggered in a "wild," spontaneous, and uncontrolled way, and to use the term *psychokinesis* in other cases.

A final detail will show that the semantic approach is never a waste of time in this kind of research. The *Motif-Index of Folk Literature* – covering stories, legends, and descriptions of beliefs – uses the term *poltergeist* as a synonym for *ghost*, *spirit*, or *household genie*.[4] In other words, it is taken as an imprecise, generic term to designate an entity that is responsible for all manner of household dysfunctions, thrown objects, the behaviour of objects in a way contrary to their nature, the mistreatment of people, and the making of noise. The nomenclature alternates between *spirit* and *poltergeist*. Despite this deliberate vagueness, it does give us a good overview of the actions attributed to poltergeists.

RUMPELGEISTS AND KOBOLDS

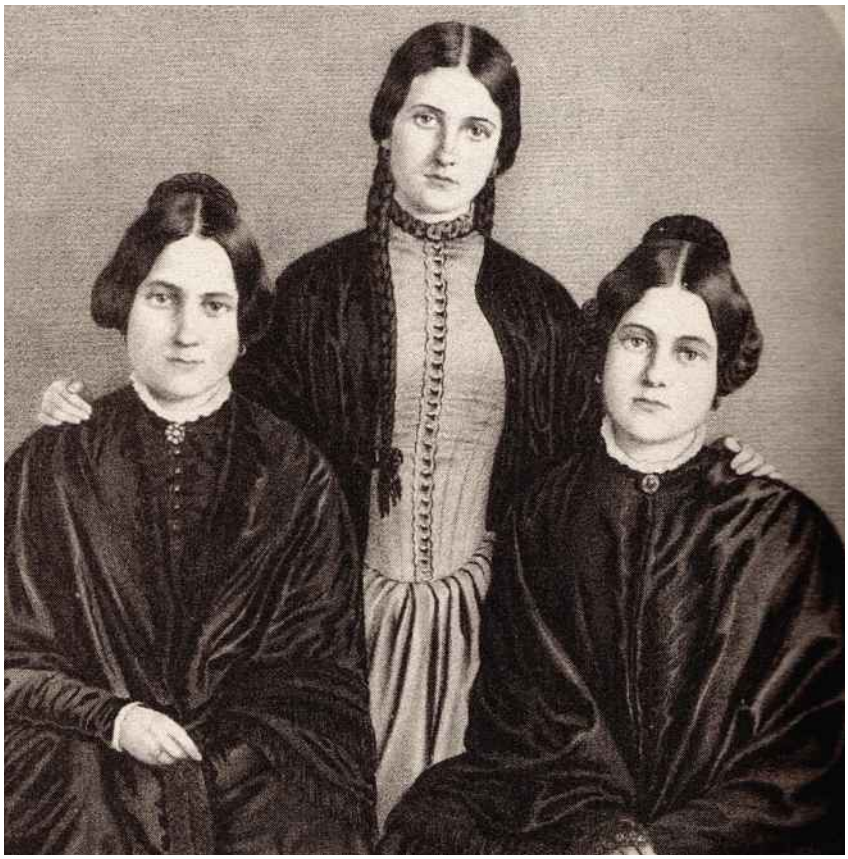
Poltergeists did not wait for the 19th century to manifest and spread – they were only evaluated differently. What names did they go by? Under what heading should they be classified?

Starting in the 16th century, writers and scholars, and Luther in particular, regularly used *Rumpelgeist*, "noisy ghost", as a synonym for *poltergeist*, but while the verb *rumpeln* has almost the same meaning as *poltern*, "to make noise", it has the additional meaning "to fall noisily" and forms part of a saying with another meaning, to wit, "to throw" or "to toss", as in "to toss everything upside down". This is also one of the characteristic features of knocking spirits. It is very revealing that the root of this word is also used to form the compound word *Rumpelmette*; this is the German for the *Tenebræ* (meaning "shadows" or "darkness"), the religious service for Holy Week which received its name because by its conclusion all lights have been extinguished. The German name emphasises its strong connection to a noisy Holy Week procession. Noise and shadows are implicitly combined in the compound word, which suggests that the darkness is propitious for a certain kind of knocking.

Luther has an interesting observation when discussing poltergeists and Rumpelgeister: "Until now the world has been filled with incorporeal poltergeists who have passed for human souls; today it is full of *Rumpelgeister* with bodies, who pass for angels."

He seems to be making a distinction between the incorporeal knocking spirits, connected to the dead, and the corporeal, noisy spirits, connected to the angels – fallen angels, of course. On several occasions, he emphasises the connection between the dead and poltergeists: "For a long time, under the reign of the Papacy, we have suffered manifestations of knocking spirits or noisy ghosts, who we believed were the souls of deceased men, condemned to wander."

Another term for the knocking spirit



FOXY LADIES: The Fox sisters began the Spiritualist movement with their rappings and table-turning.

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MANAGING SPIRIT: An illustration of a kobold on the packaging of a 19th-century German wooden puzzle.

known to Luther and his contemporaries was *Gepenst*. This term, with an extremely wide semantic field, was commonly translated into English as "spectre" during the 16th century. It in fact covers the following meanings: phantom, ghost, revenant, apparition, spirit, demon, illusion, and phantasmagoria. "Spectre" implies something that can be seen. The original importance of the term is not the spectacular apparition in itself but the conscious awareness of having the vision of something strange and unusual.

"Spectre" is the term used by the archdeacon Enoch Zobel, whose household was disturbed by a poltergeist from 2 August to 26 September 1691. This spirit hid objects, threw stones and other things, and, as a finishing touch, set fire to the woodshed.

In his account of the facts, Zobel alluded to popular interpretations that, he said, distinguished between "phantom, satanic knocking spirit, kobold, and Gütel", with this latter term describing one of the domestic spirits. The archdeacon specified that for him, however, "[T]he poltergeist is a devil like any other, except that it allows its wickedness to be seen more clearly and exercises it with more evidence." [5]

In 16th-century texts, the poltergeist is essentially a "devil" or a "spectre", but these judgements are marred by bias because they fall into the polemic between Protestants and Catholics. The recurring argument is quite simple: many of these facts are "papist" mystifications that permit the Catholic clergy to cement its authority through the use of exorcisms and sacraments, and which bring money into the coffers of the papacy.

Another name, which may come as a surprise as it describes elf-like beings and household spirits, also appears during the 17th and 18th centuries. This is the *kobold*, "the steward" or "manager". In other words, the kobold is the master of a place, as the word is derived from a verb meaning "to rule" and from the noun *Kobe*, meaning "room". Now, when we learn that the kobold is a tease and a practical joker who sows disorder in the household, especially when he is disgruntled, when we know he produces all kinds of noises and often resides in a corner of the dwelling – attic, cellar, or garret, and this offers us a link to the junk room (*Polterkammer*) mentioned earlier – it is perfectly logical to make this connection.

Here is what the pastor Jeremias Heinisch reported about what took place in his parish in Gröben, south of Berlin, from 17 June to 8 September 1718, "a memorable story that should not be taken at first glance as a fallacious fable and insane invention". It concerned a kobold which threw stones, broke windows, and tossed pots and pans into the air. Quite the sceptic, Heinisch was at first under the impression that these were malicious pranks committed by young smart alecks, but when he was unable to find any cause for the incidents he eventually attributed the manifestations "to an invisible entity that we call a spirit". In support, he cited popular opinion: "If some people wish, in accordance with general habit, to call these kinds of evil spirits 'kobolds' or 'spirit familiars' (*Spiritus familiaris*), it does not concern me in the slightest. They should be included among the evil spirits." [6]

While many regarded kobolds as evil spirits, in 1747 Georg Wilhelm Wegner proposed natural causes as an explanation for these phenomena, thinking "that men playact as kobolds… and these hoaxers took advantage to play kobolds in a house." The notion of deception even appears in the *Großes Universal-Lexikon* (Great Universal Lexicon) published by Johann Heinrich Zedler from 1732–1754. Under the entry "kobolt" it is written:

Practically speaking, kobolt means deceiver and flatterer; it is a so-called evil spirit that men claim lingers in stables, barns, and houses… and performs useful services or plays all manner of annoying tricks. [7]

This definition describes a being which is half domestic genie and half evil spirit. It is unwise to confuse the one with the other under pain of vexing and irritating them, as shown by the reaction of the protean Hinzelmann, the brownie of Hudemühlen Castle in Hanover immortalised by the Brothers Grimm. He was questioned in 1704 about whether he knew kobolds and poltergeists. "I have nothing to do with them," he responded. "They are only diabolical phantasmagoria (*Teuffels-Gespenst*)."

All these accounts let us see that the connections between the kobold and the poltergeist were taking place on the basis of a body of beliefs attributing certain events to supernatural beings, although the same kinds of events can give rise to very different interpretations.

What are the results of the linguistic inquiry?

First, the nature of the poltergeist: it can be a knocking spirit, a household spirit, a devil, a dead person, and a hoax.

Next are its essential actions: noise and thrown objects, sometimes setting fires.

Finally, the places and the times for its manifestations: the house and its adjoining area, with a predilection for junk rooms and a preference for night.

Between the 16th and early 18th centuries – long before the typologies of poltergeists drawn up by Ernesto Bozzano, Benjamin Wolman, and William G Roll – all the essential elements by which we would today recognise a poltergeist had already come together. FT

NOTES

1 Martin Luther: *D Martin Luthers Werke*, Kritische Gesamtausgabe, vol.3, pp3, 384.

2 *Ibid.*, p5358.

3 Johannes Praetorius: *Anthropodermus Plutonicus, Part One*, Magdeburg, 1666, pp314–315.

4 Stith Thompson: *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*, rev. and enlarged ed., Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1955–1958. Poltergeists are classified under the references F470–F473.

5 M Enoch Zobel: *Historiche und Theogische Voorstellung des Ebentheuerlichen Gespentses*, Leipzig, 1692, p60.

6 Jeremias Heinisch: *Das Zeugnis der reinen Wahrheit von den sonder- und wunderbaren Wirkungen eines insgeheim sogenannten Kobolds oder unsichtbaren Wesens in der Pfarrwohnung zu Gröben*, Jena, 1723, p40.

7 Johann Heinrich Zedler: *Grosses vollständiges Universal-Lexicon*, vol 15, Leipzig, 1732–54.

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CHARLES FORT'S POLTERGEIST

Among many other topics, Fort wrote of hauntings and unexplained rappings as reported in newspapers and other sources, but, as ALAN MURDIE relates, he and his wife Anna also encountered mysterious events in the London flat they shared for several years.

"I was reading last night, in the kitchen, when I heard a thump."[1]

So might begin many personal accounts of poltergeist activity. But this one was different. The words are those of Charles Fort himself, published in his last book *Wild Talents* (1932). Curiously, although he has long been acknowledged as a pioneering collector of poltergeist cases,[2] little attention has been given to Fort's own claim of witnessing phenomena himself. The events he observed and wrote about were nowhere near as dramatic as the cases detailed in his books. But they deserve attention since they led to Fort posing a theory about the causes of poltergeist activity that was well ahead of its time, certainly as regards what was being published by the psychical researchers of his day.

Fort's poltergeist – if that's what it was – occurred between March 1924 and November 1925. Like the majority of poltergeists, it invaded a domestic situation, beginning in the rooms in London where Fort was living with his wife Anna. These were at 39 Marchmont Street (right), not far from the British Museum, where Fort was busily engaged in his research. Also living in the building were the Forts' landlady and her daughter, and another family who lived upstairs.

In *Wild Talents*, Fort introduces his own story in typically idiosyncratic style, conscious that as a personal experience it stands out from others in his collections:

"I WAS READING LAST NIGHT, IN THE KITCHEN, WHEN I HEARD A THUMP"

"London *Times*, October – Oh, well, just as an exception of our own – never mind the data, this time – take my word for it… I have had what I think is about the average experience with magic."

After some asides, he states: "From records of my own experiences, I take an account of a series of small occurrences, several particulars of which are of importance to our general argument."

Fort describes how he was researching a variety of topics, including psychic phenomena, but with the emphasis upon "physical subjects, such as earthquakes and auroral beams and lights on dark parts of the moon [which] were about five to one, as compared with numbers of data upon matters of psychic research… The subject of pictures falling from walls was in my mind, but it was much submerged by other subjects and aspects of subjects. It was so inactive in my mind that, when I was told of several pictures that had fallen from walls in our house, I put that down to household insecurities, and paid no more attention."

However, matters were forced into his consciousness on 11 March 1924, as recorded in his own, "*Notes*, Letter E, Box 27 – I was reading last night, in the kitchen, when I heard a thump. Sometimes I am not easily startled, and I looked around in a leisurely manner, seeing that a picture had fallen, glass not breaking, having fallen upon a pile of magazines in a corner. Two lace curtains at sides of window. Picture fell at foot of left curtain. Now, according to my

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WITNESSES: Anna and Charles Fort experienced odd noises and falling pictures in their London flat.

impression, the bottom of the right-hand curtain was vigorously shaken, for several seconds, an appreciable length of time after the fall of the picture."

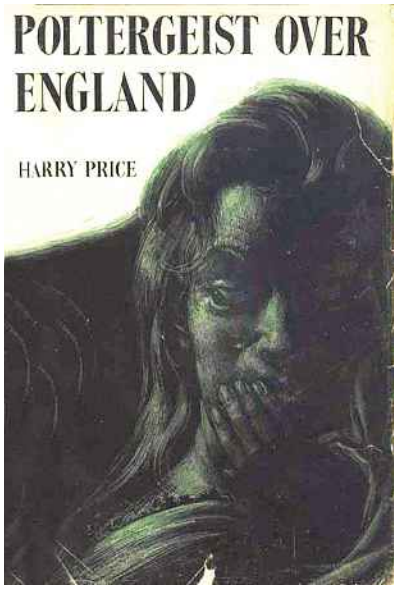
Another picture fell on 12 March, with Fort finding one of the brass rings on the back of the picture frame had been broken in two places, noting: "The look is that there had been a sharp, strong pull on the picture cord, so doubly to break this ring." Mrs Fort was also impressed, reminding him that two pictures had fallen recently in the room occupied by their neighbours.

On 18 March 1924 at about 5pm, Fort was sitting in the corner where the picture fell when he heard "a startling, crackling sound, as if of window glass breaking". But nothing had broken. Inspecting the windowpane, he found one small crack in a corner, "but the edges were grimy, indicating that it had been made long before". This incident seems to have been one that unnerved Fort. "It was so sharp and loud that for hours afterward I had a sense of alertness to dodge missiles." The noise was also heard by the neighbours upstairs.

On 28 March 1924, Fort recorded: "This morning, I found a second picture – or the fourth, including the falls in the rooms upstairs – on the floor, in the same corner. It had fallen from a place about three feet [90cm] above a bureau, upon which are piled my boxes of notes. It seems clear that the picture did not ordinarily fall, or it would have hit the notes…" In fact, Fort expresses relief at finding the picture had missed the boxes, thus "avoiding a heart-breaking mess of notes all over the floor… Sometimes I knock over a box of notes, and it's a job of hours to get them back in their places." Interestingly, he observed, "…the accounts of pictures falling from walls, … were among these notes". This time, the picture cord was found to have broken, not the ring. Fort hastily re-tied the cord and put the picture back, resolving not to tell Anna. "Partly I did not want to alarm her, and partly I did not want her to tell, and start a ghost-scare centering around me."

But, less than a month later, his wife had

IT SEEMED TO FALL FROM THE WALL INTO ANNA'S HANDS



direct experience herself with the troublesome pictures. On 18 April 1924 she set about taking a picture off the kitchen wall, to wash the glass which had been dirtied by "London smoke". Fort wrote: "The picture seemed to fall from the wall into her hands." Mrs Fort remarked: "'Another picture cord rotten.' Then: 'No: the nail came out.' But the cord had not broken, and the nail was in the wall. Later, that day, [she] said: 'I don't understand how that picture came down.'"

The next incident appears to have been on 26 July 1924, with Fort recording: "Heard a sound downstairs. Then Fannie called up: 'Mrs. Fort, did you hear that? A picture fell right off the wall.'"

Reviewing his notes, Fort formed the impression that there was "a relation between my thoughts upon falling pictures, and then, later, a falling picture."

On the evening of 22 October 1924, Fort wrote: "My eyes bad. Unable to read. Was sitting, staring at the kitchen wall, fiddling with a piece of string. Anything to pass away time. I was staring right at a picture above corner of bureau, where the notes are, but having no consciousness of the picture. It fell. It hit boxes of notes, dropped to floor, frame at a corner broken, glass broken." He recalled that the previous day he had been thinking of falling pictures…

The incidents seem to have become more sporadic afterwards – so much that Fort omitted to record any incident precisely. In the process of compiling *Wild Talents*, he found another fragmentary note from the time about a picture fastening which disappeared, but the phenomena seemed to quieten down. However, almost a year later, Fort found himself making notes again. "Night of Sept. 28–29, 1925 – a picture fell in [the landlady's] room." Note the lapse of time. However, there were gaps in his notes: "[A] note, dated Nov. 3, 1926, is missing. As I remember it, and according to allusions, in notes of November 4th, it was only a remark of mine that for more than a year no picture had fallen."

"Nov. 4, 1926 – This is worth noting. Last night, I noted about the pictures, because earlier in the evening, talking over psychic experiences with France and others, I had mentioned falling pictures in our house. Tonight, when I came home, Anna told me of a loud sound that had been heard, and how welcome it was to her, because it had interrupted [the landlady's daughter], in a long, tiresome account of the plot of a moving picture. Later they found the noise had been accompanied by the fall of a picture in the front room. Fort found the cord broken, with frayed ends. Reflecting on matters the next day, he connected the fall with Anna's state of mind, considering the daughter's "long account of a movie had annoyed her almost beyond endurance, and probably her hope for an interruption was keen. Here is an admission that I did not think, or suspect, that it was I who was the magician, this time."

Like the best poltergeists, phenomena seem to have followed the Forts when they moved back to New York, to the Bronx where their apartment contained no pictures. "I do not have pictures on walls, in places of my own," emphasised Fort. However, "October 15, 1929 – I was looking over these notes, and I called [Anna] from the kitchen to discuss them. I note that [Anna] had been doing nothing in the kitchen… While discussing those falling pictures, we heard a loud sound. Ran back, and found on the kitchen floor a pan that had fallen

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from a pile of utensils in a closet."

Almost exactly a year later, on 18 October 1930, Fort made an experiment, to try and provoke the phenomena. "I read these notes aloud to [Anna], to see whether there would be a repetition of the experience of Oct. 15, 1929. Nothing fell."

His last entry reads: "Nov. 19, 1931 – tried that again. Nothing moved. Well, then, if I'm not a wizard, I'm not going to let anybody else tell me that he's a wizard."

Reviewing his experiences, he perceptively remarked: "I would have it that, in some unknown way, I was the one who was doing this."

It is difficult to appreciate today just how radical this idea was at the time, and how alone Fort was in proposing it. Since the 1890s, arguments over poltergeist manifestations had been dogmatically split between two opposed camps. Sceptics averred that poltergeists were all explained as frauds by naughty children (particularly girls), while believers attributed them to the agency of spirits, sometimes channelled through mediums.[3] Reports were hotly disputed, with first-hand observations being ultimately taken as confirming either one entrenched view or the other.

As Fort himself clearly realised, it is one thing to be engaged in writing about anomalies but quite another (as a fair few researchers will testify!) to have them going off around you, in your home. "Just so long as I gave the *New York Something or Another*, or the *Tasmanian Whatever*, for reference, that was all very well. But now I tell a story of my own, and everybody who hasn't had pictures drop from walls, in his presence, will resent pictures falling from walls".

For his part, Fort disavowed spiritual explanations (nowhere does he attribute the incident to a poltergeist as a discarnate entity) and in keeping with the argument in *Wild Talents*, he proposed that he and his wife were unconsciously causing the phenomena. This was despite their trivial and seemingly responsive nature, which did not the fit models of poltergeist activity prevalent at the time.

Laboratory research into psychokinetic effects was in its infancy and sporadic or one-off incidents such as picture falls were invariably dismissed as coincidence or mistaken observation, although just a few months after Fort's death in May 1932, a Greek researcher, Dr A Tanagra, holding sittings with a medium, reported pictures

falling from the wall in the medium's presence.[4]

Despite publication in *Wild Talents*, Fort's ideas of poltergeist disturbances being generated by living minds went unremarked. Not for another decade did psychical researchers begin openly discussing the notion that poltergeists might originate from the human subconscious. In 1943, a Jungian analyst, Dr John Layard, published a paper in the *Proceedings* of the Society for Psychical Research, suggesting sporadic poltergeist disturbances were telekinetic expressions of an unconscious conflict in the mind of a living person. The resulting controversy was such that editor Dr Robert Thouless was forced to defend the decision to publish Layard's paper, identifying it

GOING ANALYTICAL: Freudian Nandor Fodor (left) and Jungian Dr John Layard (below).

as "a valuable and original idea, which it would be stupid to suppress because the paper gives no rigid scientific proof of its truth and because its author's methods of thought seem to me to be obscure and unfamiliar".[5] He might have been writing of Charles Fort.

Former spiritualist-turned-Freudian analyst Dr Nandor Fodor reached similar conclusions following his investigation into a poltergeist case in Thornton Heath in 1938, but again such was the controversy he suppressed his views until after World War II.[6] Even the famous Harry Price (**FT229:28–34**), who was clearly influenced by *Wild Talents* and was criticised for lacing his book *Poltergeist Over England* with snippets of forteana, nonetheless preferred to postulate poltergeists as invisible, elemental-like entities.[7]

Indeed, scepticism amongst psychical researchers regarding poltergeists endured well into the 1960s, until a number of outbreaks were observed by competent observers. In hindsight, Fort had independently postulated notions of 'recurrent spontaneous psychokinesis' (RSPK) long before it became a fashionable term for explaining poltergeists in the late 1960s. Even then, the sporadic and small-scale nature of Fort's mysterious events would not have fitted the accepted ideas of what constituted poltergeist activity. Indeed, only in 1991 was a new category of minor physical incidents postulated as an identifiable class of phenomena in its own right. Dubbed 'Jotts' (an acronym for 'Just-One-Of-Those-Things') the category was proposed by veteran psychical research Mary Rose Barrington. 'Jotts' cover "maddening little episodes – nearly always unwitnessed" – being the "things that do not fit into any prevailing paradigm… the moment a jott happens it is almost immediately discounted, discarded, in most cases forgotten and ultimately repudiated." Could one wish for a better description of a large proportion of forteana? FT

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

A barrister working in intellectual property rights and a keen investigator of paranormal claims, **ALAN MURDIE** is chairman of the Ghost Club, author of books in the *Haunted* series and co-author of *The Cambridge Ghost Book*.

NOTES

1 Charles Fort: *Wild Talents*, 1932.

2 Harry Price: *Poltergeist Over England*, Country Life Books, London, 1945.

3 Frank Podmore: "Poltergeists", *Proceedings of the SPR*, 1896–1897, vol.12, p45–115; Andrew Lang in *Proceedings of the SPR*, 1897–98, vol.13, pp604–609.

4 *Zeitschrift fur Parapsycholgie*, Germany, Aug 1932, cited in the *Journal of the SPR*, Jan 1933, vol.28, 1933–1934, p13.

5 John Layard: "Psi Phenomena and Poltergeists" in *Proceedings* 47, 1942–45, pp237–48, describing two cases in which neurotic symptoms led to apparently psychokinetic disturbances. Members complained about the poor standards of this article, which they argued was based on opinion more than on solid research and should not have been published in the *Proceedings*. Some of these letters were reprinted in *Proceedings* 47, pp267–74 and in correspondence in the *Journal of the SPR*, vol.33, 1943–6, pp79–84, 94–6, 113–6, 206. One contributor, Dr Eric Dingwall, claimed such ideas had been "discussed verbally by the very few serious and experienced students of the physical phenomena" for 15 years, but made no mention of Fort's ideas.

6 Nandor Fodor: *Haunted People*, Dutton, 1951, reprinted from *Journal of Clinical Psychopathology*, July 1945; *On the Trail of the Poltergeist*, 1958.

7 Price, *op cit*; Count Perovsky-Petrovo-Solovovo, *JSPR* Nov–Dec 1945, vol.33, pp179–181, criticised Price's inclusion in *Poltergeist Over England* of the disappearance of ships and their crews "without trace", and "the spontaneous disappearance out of doors of various objects sometimes accompanied by mysterious detonations". For his part, Price also made mention of the mysterious miniature coffins found in 1836 at Arthur's Seat, Edinburgh (now held at the National Museum of Scotland), whimsically wondering whether witches or poltergeists might be responsible.

8 Mary Rose Barrington: "Jott – 'Just one of those things'", in *Paranormal Review*, Oct 1991.

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Hitler the Noisy Ghost

Some of mankind's greatest crimes seem almost beyond human comprehension, but, asks **SD TUCKER**, do we really need to presume that people like Hitler and Stalin were possessed by demons and poltergeists in order to account for them?

A number of years back now, the 'Diary' column in *The Times* ran a series entitled "Fascinating Historical Questions to which the Answer is No", in which silly tabloid newspaper headlines from around the world – of the "Did Aliens Really Build the Pyramids?" and "Was Jack the Ripper Actually Queen Victoria?" – type were mercilessly catalogued and lampooned. The compilers of these lists, however, missed perhaps the weirdest such headline, the classic "Is Hitler a Poltergeist?" which appeared in issue 480 of the British Spiritualist journal *Psychic News* on 2 August 1941. The accompanying article was a summary of a column which had appeared in the *Guardian* the previous week, making various comparisons between the Nazi leader and poltergeist phenomena.[1]

The basic thrust of the *Guardian* writer's argument was as follows.

Essentially, he claimed, there were "extraordinarily significant points of resemblance between the records of poltergeist hauntings and the Nazi movement. Both are manifested in a subconscious desire for power… both suck, like vampires, the energies of adolescents; both issue in noise, destruction, fire and terror… Hitler speaks best in a state of semi-trance… Whether the uprush of unconscious energy generated through him and sucking into itself the psychophysical forces of German youth is merely the outcome of an unformulated group-desire for power, or whether, like some of the poltergeist hauntings, it would seem to have another source, is an open question."[2] At first sight, this seems rather an extraordinary comparison, but the author of the article was not entirely alone in making such claims during wartime.

> Some thought Germany was a breeding ground for spooks

Some commentators, mindful perhaps of the origins of the term 'poltergeist' as being a German loan-word, appeared to think that the enemy country was a fertile breeding ground for destructive spooks. The writer Sacheverell Sitwell, for instance, whose book *Poltergeists* was first published in 1940, was just such a theoriser (he was the brother of Edith Sitwell, whose poem *The Drum* retells the story of the 'Demon Drummer of Tedworth', one of the most famous of all English poltergeists). He seemed to feel that what made a poltergeist focus was not just the person's own character or physiology, but also the type of area that he or she came from. Particularly suitable, apparently, were areas which were full of "crime or violence" or which were "backward or lonely". In Sitwell's opinion, Germany during the first half of the 20th century had certain towns within it which fulfilled all of these criteria.

According to him: "The two most remarkable mediums of modern times, the brothers Willi and Rudi Schneider, came from Braunau, an old town which was the birthplace, too, of Adolf Hitler, the perfect type of a medium if ever there was one, who is described in the

FACING PAGE: Adolph Hitler posing to a recording of one of his speeches following his release from Landsberg prison in 1925. He insisted the prints and negatives be destroyed, but photographer Heinrich Hoffmann disobeyed orders.

FACING PAGE: GETTY IMAGES / HULTON ARCHIVE / HEINRICH HOFFMANN

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newspapers, upon every dramatic or terrible occasion, as 'walking like one in a trance', or 'stepping from his aeroplane, like a person absorbed', and giving vent, alternatively, to the hysterical climaxes of the true poltergeist. We could readily believe that this remarkable person, did he feel so inclined, could displace objects and move them about in oblique and curving flight; could rap out equivocal answers; or cause lighted matches to drop down from the ceiling." [3]

This all seems somewhat exaggerated, of course; and yet, simultaneously, such claims are almost understandable. Writing a book about destructive spirits while the most destructive war mankind has ever known raged on around him, perhaps it was not really a surprise that Sitwell should have chosen to compare Hitler in passing to a poltergeist medium unleashing powerful, damaging forces onto the world around him. Sitwell, after all, is clearly speaking in metaphors; at no point does he say that Hitler *actually is* a poltergeist focus, or possessed, after all. And yet, as with so many metaphors, ideas such as Sitwell's have been misinterpreted, misapplied and taken all-too-literally by those who have read them.

Perhaps most famously, for example, as recently as 2006, when Father Gabriele Amorth – "the Vatican's chief exorcist" as he is habitually termed in tabloid-speak – made a public pronouncement in which he claimed that both Hitler and Josef Stalin were possessed by Satan and other evil spirits during their time in power. "I am convinced that the Nazis were all possessed," he told reporters. "All you have to do is think about what Hitler – and Stalin – did… You can tell by their behaviour and their actions, from the horrors they committed and the atrocities that were committed on their orders. That's why we need to defend society from demons." Father Amorth also made vague references to "secret Vatican documents", which supposedly showed that Pope Pius XII tried to perform what he called "a long-distance exorcism" upon Hitler during World War II, but which, sadly, failed to work. [4]

This kind of claim may seem simply to be harmless eccentricity at first glance, but it is not. In reality, such pronouncements reveal in their speakers a glaring inability to accept a human source for evil actions. In essence, people like Father Amorth are actually providing Hitler and his ilk with a kind of excuse for their activities, saying that it was not the Nazis' fault that so many people died, but the Devil's. To Amorth, the intervention of the Devil is actually the root cause of all human evil – even, as he explained to some outcry in 2010, the scandal currently affecting the Catholic Church. "All evil is due to the intervention of the Devil, including pædophilia," he

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"I AM CONVINCED THAT THE NAZIS WERE ALL POSSESSED"

told a reporter from *The Times*, going on to add that "legions of demons" were living in the Vatican as "Satan sets out to damage the leadership of the Church – and of politics, industry and sport, for that matter." [5] This kind of thinking seems to be prevalent amongst those who accept the rather dubious proposition that Hitler was in fact nothing more than some kind of spirit medium gone badly wrong.

According to a Lee Warren, for instance, writing in a 2002 article posted online entitled *Demonic Possession of World Leaders*, the crimes committed against humanity by dictators such as Hitler and Stalin were too extreme and barbaric in their nature to be the work of merely human hands: "Just some psychopathic human action alone cannot perpetrate this magnitude of evil. Something far more intelligent, sinister, and cunning than man, and which has hatred for… mankind… is involved here." This, says Warren, is because "there are crimes that are committed that are beyond a human's ability to perpetrate without some help. This diabolical assistance or influence is the role of preternatural spirits that are beyond the physical." Therefore, his ultimate conclusion is that both Hitler and Stalin were possessed, as "There is no other way to explain how such uneducated misfits were able to hypnotize a nation." [6] Really? *No* other way? I think not.

Perhaps it is just more comfortable for some people to feel that poltergeists and demons were behind WWII and the Holocaust than to admit that human beings could have been responsible for such heinous crimes. If so, however, they are merely burying their heads in the sand and avoiding reality. There is, it may not be very surprising to learn, very little evidence to be found that Adolf Hitler was actually a victim of possession, whether by poltergeists or other forces, and what little there is seems generally to collapse under more serious examination.

For example, one quote which seems to keep on popping up on websites which deal with such matters is taken from Hermann Rauschning's 1939 book *Hitler Speaks*. Rauschning, a minor Nazi official who later recanted his earlier beliefs, claimed to have met Hitler on numerous occasions, and his description of the man seems to have become an influential one: "One cannot help thinking of him as a medium. For most of the time, mediums are ordinary, insignificant people. Suddenly, they are endowed with what seem to be supernatural powers, which sets them apart from the rest of humanity. The medium is possessed. Once the crisis is passed, they fall back again into mediocrity. It was in this way, beyond any doubt, that Hitler was possessed by forces outside of himself – almost demoniacal forces of which the individual man was only a temporary vehicle." [7] This is, of course, one possible explanation for the fact that Hitler was able to transform from a rather nondescript figure into a notoriously effective firebrand once up there on the podium in front of a crowd – but a simple gift for oratory would be another, rather more plausible one.

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ABOVE: Destruction in the London Blitz. "When such things happen now, one has to send for the ambulance, the fire engine, and the hearse instead of calling in the Society for Psychical Research". **FACING PAGE, TOP:** Writer and poet Sir Sacheverell Sitwell. **FACING PAGE, BOTTOM:** "Vatican's chief exorcist" Don Gabriele Amorth.

In any case, Rauschning's book, following investigations made in the 1980s by a Swiss scholar, Wolfgang Hänel, is now generally regarded as a fake, perpetrated by Rauschning upon his eager publisher for the sake of a 125,000-franc advance.

To summarise, then, the *metaphor* of Hitler being possessed, or a poltergeist medium, as put forward by people such as Sacheverell Sitwell, is a perfectly good one. Its literal acceptance, however, is far less positive. A contemporary reviewer, Ivor Brown, casting his eye over Sitwell's book in the *Guardian* on 13 July 1940, though, seems to have rather more perspective upon such matters than modern theorists such as Gabriele Amorth do. Remarking first of all that "These are hard times for ghosts", he goes on to say that "There are now at large on earth and sea and in the sky countless human and mechanical agents which are capable of doing this job [smashing things up] so much more thoroughly that the spirits are drastically put in the shade. The spook who makes moan and weird music in the air must play second… fiddle to the shrieking bomb which follows the monitory siren."

While admitting that the individual poltergeist, by causing fires and destroying objects, might well "be said to behave like a tiny air raid", Brown also makes the point that Londoners used to "air raids not so tiny" might be forgiven for dismissing such things as being merely "small beer" compared to the actions of the rather more corporeal pilots of the German Luftwaffe. "Our flesh-and-blood Homo Normalis of 1940 can teach any ghost a thing or two about things that go bump in the night. Those of us who survive this war are not going to be greatly alarmed by a waltzing wardrobe or a series of unpleasant noises round about and up aloft. We have had all that and rather more… When such things happen now one has to send for the ambulance, the fire engine, and the hearse instead of calling in the Society for Psychical Research. If suffer we must, let the world have more visitation of the "geist" and less of the German." [8] These are wise words. While some people may find some small comfort or intellectual satisfaction in the notion that both Hitler individually and Nazi Germany as a whole were somehow 'a people possessed', ultimately the whole idea is utterly inadequate and acts only to trivialise both the effects and causes of some very widespread and yet, in the final analysis, sadly all-too-human evils. FT

NOTES

1 The article, according to Harry Price, appeared in the issue for 25 July 1941, but I have been unable to trace it in copies of what was still then termed the *Manchester Guardian* for that date; perhaps, then, it was actually contained within the now long-defunct weekly Church of England newspaper also called *The Guardian*, which publication remained sadly unavailable to me.

2 Quoted in Harry Price: *Poltergeist Over England*, Country Life, 1945, pp5–6.

3 Sacheverell Sitwell: *Poltergeists: An Introduction and Examination Followed by Chosen Instances*, University Books, 1959, p54.

4 "Hitler and Stalin were Possessed by the Devil says Vatican Exorcist" – http://bit.ly/bjbkIt (*D.Mail*, 28 Aug 2006).

5 "I have work to do says exorcist on the front line against Satan", *Times*, 13 Mar 2010.

6 http://bit.ly/MtCfNA (plim.org).

7 Quoted, for example, at http://bit.ly/MtCfNA (plim.org) and http://bit.ly/PCGNvl (abovetopsecret.com).

8 Ivor Brown: "Things That Go Bump in the Night", *Manchester Guardian*, 13 July 1940.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

SD TUCKER is the author of the forthcoming books *Paranormal Merseyside* (Amberley 2012) and *Terror of the Tokoloshe* (CFZ Press 2013). While he has had a life-long fascination with Adolf Hitler, he is (probably) not actually a Nazi himself.

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The Fortean Times Random Dictionary of the Damned

compiled by the Hierophant's Apprentice

No 47: LEVITATION

Charles Fort invented the word 'teleportation', yet appears to have taken no interest in levitation, which might be taken to be the prelude, in some cases at least, of the grander phenomenon. But levitation is strange enough as anomalous phenomena – or claims of such – go. And besides, it has a long history, and so deserves inclusion in this dictionary.

Perhaps Fort declined to go in search of reports of levitation because in his day it was so easily associated with Spiritualism, which he famously regarded as too vulnerable to fraud to bother with. He also had the nerve to remark (*Lo!*, Ch:5), "I never write about marvels." Of course not. Looking at the early history of reports of levitation, too, it's clear that it edges on the miraculous, and is inextricable from the claims made on behalf of prophets and saints. Religion, in short: of which the latter-day Spiritualist movement is surely a part. We have dealt with the limitations of miracles *per se* (be they 'real' or 'false') elsewhere (**FT276:53–55**), and did mention levitation there, in passing. Here we'll try to scratch a little further under the surface, or beneath the floating feet.

TALES OF SUSPENSE: Yogi Subbayah Pullavar in a trance, photographed 6 June 1936.

BEWARE DEBUNKER LOGIC

Appearing to levitate is an ancient illusionist's turn, and a good draw for a stage magician. If you poke about on YouTube, you can see it performed. You can also see the likes of David Blaine explain how he does his particular trick, which is a traditional one known in the trade as the Balducci Levitation. You could learn it yourself, although it does depend on being at the right angle to your audience so that they can't see you're keeping one of your feet on the ground.

'The Ellusionist' [*sic*] offers instructions for a variety of such illusions – in exchange, naturally, for coin of *this* realm and no other (see www.levitation.org). Among those on offer is Corey King's technique. Part of the pitch reads: "The best thing is that the spectator can see both your feet in the air… and it utilizes absolutely *no gimmicks*. The performer talks about harnessing power from the earth… The performer is seen to rise three to four inches – and hover – momentarily. He immediately walks forward to the spectators and they can examine his feet, shoes, and anything about him – there is nothing to find because there *is* nothing." The trick "needs good misdirection", but "can be done on the street or indoors and *both* feet are seen to go off the ground". Then there's the Asrah Levitation, strictly for the stage, which needs rigging. "The magician's assistant lies on a table, before being covered by a cloth. Slowly… the assistant 'floats' several feet into the air." The 'floating' can be seen from all angles. The finale is "breath taking", as the spectators witness the assistant "simply vanishing

in mid-air". Breathtaking, indeed; although it seems the cost of the instructions is too. Another pricey one is Peter Loughran's 'The Elevator', a "new mechanical marvel levitation device" that lifts you 3–4 inches (75–100mm) off the ground. Viewers at your front and sides can see both your feet off the ground, and you can perform an "awesome" mid-air rotation. Needs a lot of practice, apparently.

All this sounds like lots of fun, which is right and proper. Debunking killjoys and party poopers tend to step in at about this juncture and point out that if stage magicians can fool most of the people most of the time, then yogis, saints, mediums and paranormalists have been doing the same. This is often true. For instance, it's not too hard to work out that many a 'yogi' makes use of a cantilevered seat and a metal plate under his mat to 'float' serenely above the mundane world. *All* apparent levitations may be the result of some such hokum or the product of misperception and/or wishful thinking. It's not that we're quibbling with at the moment: it's the debunkers' logic, which in effect says that if something seemingly paranormal *can* be faked, it *has* been faked, in every instance. The reasoning doesn't work because, as art forgers and currency counterfeiters have long demonstrated, the existence of a fake Rembrandt or $100 bill doesn't preclude the existence of the real thing. Indeed, the forgery *depends* on the reality of the genuine article. For decades, Hollywood special effects wizards have been purporting to show the effects of bullet wounds. These attempts are often more spectacular than accurate, but you can't make a defensible leap of logic from there to the idea that, actually, people *never* get shot, with sometimes gruesomely bloody results.

HAVE VIRTUE, WILL LEVITATE

There is a long tradition in Hinduism of wise men (*gurus*) who have achieved a state of grace (or 'realisation' or 'enlightenment'), usually through devotion and meditation, and become *siddhas* (men of spiritual power), one sign of which is the ability to levitate. One such was Yogi Subbayah Pullavar, who on 6 June 1936 was photographed while in a trance, suspended several feet above the ground, with one hand resting lightly on a cloth-covered stick. There were about 150 witnesses to the event, which lasted about four minutes. While no one could discern any exterior props or supports, one's whiskers twitch at the detail that the yogi entered a small tent in order to achieve his levitation, which was then revealed, but then his assistants re-erected the tent so that he could descend to earth in privacy. So neither ascent nor descent were seen by independent witnesses. One has to wonder why not. The 'official' explanation, according to Hindu yoga teaching, is that adepts who awaken the *anahata* chakra (near the heart) acquire the ability to 'walk in the air'.[1] Claims in the late 1970s by Transcendental Meditation (founder and Beatles fan: Maharishi Mahesh Yogi; see **FT170:44–49**) to have taught its students, not inexpensively, to levitate had, by the mid-1990s, been somewhat diluted by successful lawsuits claiming the opposite, and money back please.

It's probable that there are fewer levitating saints in Christian than in Indian tradition, but there's not exactly a shortage of them. JJ von Görres noted 72, while Olivier Leroy identified at least 200.[2] Unlike the levitations of Indian holy men, these were spontaneous events, usually occurring in 'rapture' – the trance-like state of being seized by a sense of the Divine. Leroy's diligent researches led him to conclude that the average height of saintly levitations was 20in (50cm), although one should note that the Spanish ascetic St Peter of Alcantara (1499–1562) was once "carried up in the air to a great height, far above the trees, when with his arms crossed on his chest he continued to soar while hundreds of little birds gathered around him, making a most agreeable concert with their songs". The *Catholic Encyclopedia* chooses not to mention this event. Other, perhaps better known, levitating saints include St Dunstan (918–988), St Francis of Assisi (1186–1226), St Dominic (1170–1221), Thomas Aquinas (1226–1274), Savonarola (1452–1498), St Ignatius Loyola (1491–1556), and St Joseph of Copertino (1603–1663, shown below). The last is credited with some 70 levitations: in one, he is said to have floated at tree-top height for over two hours; another time, he was witnessed rising into the air with a lamb perched on his shoulder. When presented with an aristocrat seeking a cure for his insanity, St Joseph began to levitate, grabbed the madman by his hair, and soared upward with him. When they returned to the ground, the patient was cured.[3]

How much of these saints' stories are accretions of legend is (perhaps not too) difficult to say. Ascribing signs, wonders and miracles to revered individuals belongs in a robust tradition. One is entitled to wonder if some pious embellishment has accrued around St Teresa of Avila (1515–82; and as it happens a friend of Peter of Alcantara), who has become more famous in a fallen world for her ecstasies and alleged levitations than for her acute and influential mystical theology or barefoot reforming zeal. Teresa wrote extensively about her mystical experiences, and there is no doubt she *sensed* she rose, irresistibly, toward the Godhead when in rapture: "my soul was carried away, and almost always my head with it – and now and then the whole body as well, so that it was lifted up from the ground… There is no power against this power… I confess that it threw me into a great fear… for when I saw my body lifted up from the earth, how could I help it?… When the rapture was over, my body seemed frequently to be buoyant, as if all the weight had departed from it; so much so that now and then I scarcely knew that my feet touched the ground."[4] From such an account one can see how, in the close life of a convent, a subjective account of an entranced, out-of-body experience might be Chinese-whispered into a 'reliable, objective' witness's report.[5]

ECONOMIES OF PHOTOGRAPHIC TRUTH

Spiritualist mediumship emerged in the 1840s, at almost the same time as the invention of the camera. While there are many reports of séance-room levitations, few if any photographs of mediums being wafted aloft survive. But there is a famous photograph of an otherwise rather obscure medium, Colin Evans, in full flight, taken during a séance at Wortley Hall, Finsbury Park, London, on 27 May 1938. The camera supposedly had an infra-red lens fitted, but the shadows in the image indicate this was a flash picture; and what happened was also caught by another camera at another angle.

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Paranormalists may wish to argue otherwise, but hardly anyone who's looked at high-quality prints of these pictures has failed to be intrigued by the 'string' snaking away from Evans's left hand. No less interesting are the peculiar rucks, creases and dragged-up trousers in Evans's suit, and the way his lower legs and trousers are curiously, uniquely blurred. One might infer that Evans was being yanked up by some kind of harness (hence the rucked suit), but there's probably a simpler explanation. Following Joe Nickell,[6] Mori proposes that the 'string' is a wire connecting a remote shutter button to a flash camera. Evans merely tucked his feet up on his seat, jumped off it and triggered the camera at the apogee of his leap. Hence the creased clothes and strangely blurry trouser cuffs and feet; not to mention the fact that Evans looks more like a man who's been very thoroughly goosed than one being uplifted by otherworldly spiritual forces.

The whole point of the exercise, Mori suggests, was to create photographic "evidence" of levitation with the aid of the spirit world. He also points out that within a year Harry Price – citing his own reliable witnesses – had undermined Evans's claim: in *Fifty Years of Psychical Research* (1939), he wrote: "This medium claims that, in complete darkness, he is 'levitated'. Mrs A Peel Goldney, Mrs Henry Richards and others were convinced that at this particular test no levitation took place *and the cheque paid to the medium was returned to the sitters.* [Emphasis added] … How photographs can be obtained of a man assumed to be levitating, but in reality jumping, is graphically recorded (with illustrations) in *Proc.*, SPR, Vol. XLV, Part 158, pp196–8."

One current website,[7] adducing one of the Evans images as 'proof', insists: "The most likely and acceptable explanation [for levitation] is the Eastern theory of an existence of a force (simply, a universal force) which belongs to another, nonmaterial reality, and manifests itself in the material world." Maybe so, but that hypothesis is currently – perhaps eternally – untestable, and the Evans 'evidence' has been debunked, in the best and proper sense of the word. The Colin Evans photographs, like innumerable 'ghost' and 'UFO' photos, can be seen as a latter-day equivalent of the rumour, hearsay and false memories circulating in the mediæval world concerning the wonders performed by saints. The pictures of 'Janet' allegedly levitating during the series of events (1977–8) known as the Enfield Poltergeist case (**FT32:47–48**; **33:4–5**; **166:39**; **229:58–59**) bear some similarities to the Evans photos – note the flying hair, the position of the limbs, and in this instance the way her clothes seem unresponsive to paranormal persuasion (despite the hair). These pictures too still have their defenders.

One man's unimpeachable testimony is another's sheer hokum. Which does rather raise the question of what, exactly, amounts to useful evidence of a phenomenon as odd as levitation.

CAUGHT ON THE HOP: Colin Evans looks down on the crowd at a seance.

SOCIETY FOR PSYCHICAL RESEARCH

HOME, SWEET HOME

Possibly the most famous 19th-century levitation of all is said to have occurred in the evening of 13 December 1868 at a third-storey apartment in Ashley House, Victoria Street, London. Or it may have been in Victoria Street itself, or at 5 Buckingham Gate, Kensington, depending on which account you read. Present were the Earl of Crawford and Balcarres (the Master of Lindsay), Viscount Adare, his cousin Captain Charles Wynne, and Daniel Dunglas Home, who had become famous throughout Europe as a medium and especially for his levitations. Space precludes citing all the inconsistencies in their reports. The story in essence is that Home, in a trance, enjoined the three to remain in their seats; then he went into an adjoining room, opened the window onto the street, slid out of it, and re-entered the house through the window (which he opened) of the room where the gentlemen were still dutifully seated. Their presumption was, and for many remains, that he had floated, or levitated, across the space between, some 80ft (24.5m) above the pavement, according to Home.

In the October 1980 issue of *Alpha* magazine, Archie Jarman published an analysis of the witnesses' varying reports of what had occurred, and where – tracking down a house in Ashley *Place*, off Victoria Street, that fitted details of the witnesses' descriptions. The windows, 7ft 5in (2.13m) apart, were actually 45ft (13.5m) above the street, and each was fronted by small, 15in (38cm)-deep balcony and a low balustrade. Under the balconies ran a 5in (13cm)-wide flat cornice. Unsupported, Jarman had a crack at crossing between the windows on this but gave it up as impossible, or maybe just too unnerving. Perhaps someone more confident and more athletic might have succeeded. Jarman speculated that Home (who was familiar with the building) had rigged up a tightrope, attaching it to the base of the shutters. Considerations of elfin safety precluded putting this idea to practical test.[8] Our own speculation concerns the 6in (15cm)-deep recess in the exterior wall between the windows. A rope, even a sturdy twine, could have been secured here to give a handhold, and reassurance and poise, to someone slipping on foot along the narrow cornice. In 1920, escapologist and debunker Harry Houdini had prepared to repeat what he called "the DD Home levitation stunt" at the house, but apparently his assistant bottled out.[9] Evidently, then, Houdini thought a transition between these particular windows quite feasible *without* the support of spiritual powers.

As evidence, then, the reports by the witnesses to Home's most famous 'levitation' are flimsy indeed. Yet Sir William Crookes, referring to this case, would maintain that to "reject the recorded evidence… is to reject all human testimony whatever; for no fact in sacred or profane history is supported by a stronger array of proofs". Looking at accounts of séance-room levitations, one is struck equally by the witnesses' assiduity in looking for trickery, and their failure to focus their attention in the right direction. For example, Crookes wrote: "Home sometimes tucked up his feet on the seat of the chair and held up his hands in full view of all of us. On such an occasion I have got down and seen and felt that all four legs were off the ground at the same time, Home's feet being on the chair… Less frequently the levitating power was extended to those sitting next to him. Once my wife was thus raised off the ground in her chair." Might looking at Home or at what was

over his head have been a better test? We recall the stage magician's technique of misdirection here. Home would baldly ask sitters not to look at him once he began to ascend. What didn't he want them to notice? And what quality of evidence comes from eyewitnesses who are told not to use their eyes?

HOBERMAN COLLECTION / UIG VIA GETTY IMAGES

LEVERAGE: Coral Castle, built single-handed – the secret was in knowing how.

AGE OF ANXIETY

The 20th century saw perhaps even greater conflict over the rôle, meaning, and social implications of science than did the 19th, and one reaction to a conventional scientistic wisdom that seems oppressively mechanistic and inappropriately rational – when not actually lethal – is to promote claims for officially impossible phenomena. The religious inspiration for the exploits of saints and mediums has faded from memory, but knowledge of their feats has not. In the last century, levitation began to have more secular, but no less miraculous, associations. So from some quarters we are treated to condescending and more or less racist wheezes that, for instance, suggest that the ancient Egyptians were not so much brilliant civil engineers but more like magicians, who knew how to levitate the stones of the pyramids into place. The only virtue of this idea is that it's a short step up from the one that says the Egyptians were so dumb that aliens had to do it for them.

According to Stephen Wagner,[10] who vaguely cites the 10th-century Arab historian Abul Hasan Ali Al-Masudi, "a 'magic papyrus' (paper) was placed under the stone to be moved. Then the stone was struck with a metal rod that caused the stone to levitate and move along a path paved with stones and fenced on either side by metal poles. The stone would travel along the path, wrote Al-Masudi, for a distance of about 50 metres [164ft] and then settle to the ground. The process would then be repeated until the builders had the stone where they wanted it." Wagner provides the necessary veneer of pseudo-scientific plausibility by hinting that this may have been a manipulation of acoustics, and wonders if the three 1,000-tonne foundation stones at the Temple of Jupiter at Baalbek, Lebanon, were so moved, along with a couple more suitably exotic ancient monuments, with a passing mention of Stonehenge for good measure.

On a related page,[11] Wagner waxes lyrical about the not-so-ancient Coral Castle of Homestead, Florida, begun in 1923, and still being embellished in 1951. The castle comprises some 1,100 tonnes of sculpted coral, arranged over 10 acres (4ha); one obelisk weighs 28 tonnes; the largest block weighs 35 tonnes; the average block weighs 6 tonnes. There is a 9-tonne gate that reputedly swings open at the touch of a finger. Coral Castle was built single-handed by Latvian-born Edward Leedskalnin (1887–1951), a 5ft (1.5m)-tall, 7-stone (45kg) amateur sculptor who also invented a perpetual motion machine and an anti-gravity device, held unorthodox views on magnetism, and declared that the "secret to the universe is 7129/6105195." How Leedskalnin built his castle is not precisely known, as he worked alone at night by lantern-light. When asked how he did it, he would answer that he understood "the laws of weight and leverage well", or "It's not difficult really. The secret is in knowing how." He also wrote, "I have discovered the secrets of the pyramids."[12]

In an article in *Fate* magazine,[13] Frank Joseph says: "Some teenagers spying on him one evening claimed they saw him 'float coral blocks through the air like hydrogen balloons', but no one took them seriously" yet then goes on to cite "alternative science investigator" Ray Stoner insisting that the castle "must be exactly situated over an energy vortex, aligned with a celestial event or events sufficiently precise to predict their recurrence, constructed in a specific shape, and built with certain materials". Stephen Wagner quotes Christopher Dunn, who asks, apparently not rhetorically: "What if there's no such thing as gravity? And the natural forces we already know about are sufficient to explain the noted phenomena we have labeled as gravity? Perhaps Leedskalnin's means of working with the Earth's gravitational pull was nothing more complicated than devising a means by which the alignment of magnetic elements within his coral blocks was adjusted to face the streams of individual magnets he claims are issuing forth from the Earth with a like repelling pole."[14] The official Coral Castle website (https://coralcastle.com) says more prosaically that Leedskalnin "had acquired some skills working in lumber camps and came from a family of stonemasons in Latvia. He drew on this knowledge and strength to cut and move these blocks."

Objective evidence for levitation is thin, but as a subjective experience it is undoubtedly authentic. One of its more interesting aspects is that its causes – or justifications, if you prefer – have shifted over time, more or less in step with cultural changes. None of these apprehensions can be called scientific: indeed they become increasingly pseudo-scientific as the centuries pass. But science has limitations, as real scientists know, and – as they should know but often don't – for that reason, it also needs friendly antagonists to keep the boggarts of scientism at bay. FT

NOTES

1 *Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology*, Fifth Edition, Gale, 2001, p916.

2 *Ibid.*, p909; refs: Olivier Leroy: *Levitation*, Burns, Oates, 1928; JJ von Görres: *Die Christliche Mystik*, 5 vols. Regensburg & Landshut, 1836–42.

3 *Ibid., loc. cit.*, and p913. Joseph of Copertino's efficacious shock treatment of the mad nobleman recalls one of the magician-physicians of Myddfai, Carmarthenshire, who once cured a chronic depressive by making him squat precariously on a rock overlooking the water of a pool on the upper Towy River and then, without warning, firing a shotgun blank a few inches behind him. (Lecture by Lewis J Jones, Llandovery, 2004).

4 Amalgamated from two quotations: *Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology*, p912, and Leonard G Cramp: *The Cosmic Matrix: Piece for a jigsaw, Part 2*, Adventures Unlimited, 1999, p179.

5 Schmöger's account of a statement by stigmatist Anne Catherine Emmerich (1774–1824) is particularly redolent of an out-of-body experience: "When I was doing my work as vestry-nun, I was often lifted up suddenly into the air, and I climbed up and stood on the higher parts of the church, such as windows, sculptured ornaments, jutting stones; I would clean and arrange everything in places where it was humanly impossible. I felt myself lifted and supported in the air, and I was not afraid in the least, for I had been accustomed from a child to being assisted by my guardian angel." See *Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology*, p909.

6 Joe Nickell: *Camera Clues*, University Press of Kentucky, 2005.

7 See http://bit.ly/NtCJj5 (antigravitypower.tripod.com).

8 Jarman's pioneering article is extensively quoted in Lynn Picknett: "Flight from Reality?", *The Unexplained* No.20, Orbis, 1982, pp396–397.

9 *Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology*, p911.

10 See http://bit.ly/tyCsax (paranormal.about.com) and also http://bit.ly/4CQqEY (paranormal.about.com).

11 See http://bit.ly/RH3TFO (paranormal.about.com); John Michell: *Eccentric Lives and Peculiar Notions*, 1984, pp84–88.

12 See http://bit.ly/fURV5K (unexplained-mysteries.com).

13 See http://bit.ly/R8QjgV(dankalia.com); no further bibliographic details available.

14 See http://bit.ly/4KP7f0 (paranormal.about.com).

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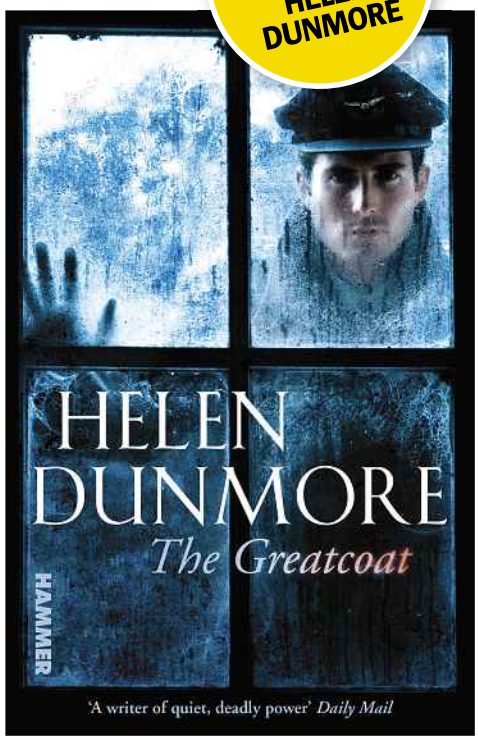

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The Satori deer

ANDREW MAY seeks enlightenment from a deer – or should that be a telepathic ape-man?

ANDREW MAY is a former scientist living in the south-west of England. He has a lifelong interest in fortean, pulp fiction, metaphysics and anything weird or mysterious.

Satori is a Japanese word meaning 'understanding', which is used in Zen Buddhism to refer to a sudden moment of enlightenment. According to Richard Freeman's *The Great Yokai Encyclopædia* (CFZ Press, 2010), Satori is also a long-haired, ape-like creature that can read human minds and is therefore very hard to catch. I suspect there may be a closer connection between the two meanings than first meets the eye.

At the London Buddhist Society in the 1990s, the late Venerable Myokyo-Ni and her pupil Martin Goodson (now the Venerable Sochu) frequently recounted a Zen fable called 'The Satori deer'. This told of a magical creature that behaved in a strikingly similar way to the telepathic ape described by Richard Freeman. The following version of the story is taken from an article by Martin Goodson in the February 1997 issue of *The Middle Way* magazine:

A woodcutter one day went into the forest and began cutting down a tree. He just happened to glance up and there on the other side of the clearing was a strange animal. It was rather like a deer but totally white from top to toe. As he looked at it the animal opened its mouth and said: "You're wondering what I am." The man jumped in surprise, at which the animal said: "You're surprised that an animal has 'spoken'." The man was flabbergasted. The Satori deer said: "You don't know what to do now – you have never seen me before."' The woodcutter thought, "How curious," and the Satori deer said: "You're wondering what you are going to tell everybody when you get home, aren't you?" The man rested himself against the tree. The Satori deer said: "You are beginning to think I am telepathic and can read your thoughts." The man stood up and the Satori deer said: "You're feeling a little embarrassed and self-conscious." The man shuffled from one foot to the other. The Satori deer said: "You are beginning to get a little irritated with me." And he was – he was quite cross. The Satori deer went on and said: "You are thinking of picking up that axe and throwing it at my skull." The man picked up the axe and made a lunge for this creature, but of course the Satori deer knew exactly what he was going to do. Every time a thought occurred to him, the Satori deer could anticipate it by jumping the other way. So after several futile attempts the man decided that the best thing he could do was ignore the creature and just get on with cutting down the tree. The Satori deer said: "You're trying to ignore me and continue cutting down that tree." But as the man concentrated all his energy into cutting down the tree, the Satori deer spoke less and less until eventually he fell silent. The woodsman continued to cut down the tree with the Satori deer standing there waiting until, as the woodsman raised his axe, the axe-head broke away from the handle, flew across the clearing and killed the Satori deer stone dead. And that is how to kill a Satori deer.

In a Zen context, the meaning of the fable is pretty clear. The talking deer represents the chattering commentary that goes on all the time inside your head, which – according to Zen teaching – you need to 'kill' before you can achieve enlightenment. But why is it symbolised in the form of a deer? The story would actually make more sense with an ape – like the one in *The Great Yokai Encyclopaedia* – because apes really do chatter all the time, and they have a reputation for mimicking human behaviour. Zen is very much an oral tradition, handed down from teacher to student, and my guess is that at some stage – possibly at the Daitoku-ji monastery where Myokyo-Ni received her training – some teacher decided to vary the tale by substituting a cute Bambi-like creature for a big hairy ape.

Zen is different from other moral teachings in that, in order to get its point across, some of its fables are blatantly immoral. This is to shock the student into understanding. The tale of the Satori deer, with its killing of a defenceless animal, is typical of the genre. In a better known story from the Zen classic *The Gateless Gate*, a master of Zen named Nansen 'solves' a dispute two monks are having over ownership of a cat by cutting the cat in half. The gist of the story is virtually the same as the Biblical tale of the Judgment of Solomon… with the difference that Solomon merely threatened to cut the disputed baby in half – he didn't go through with it! FT

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Devon's mystery island

Michael Goldsworthy thinks he's found the location of Joseph of Arimathea's tomb – and maybe that of Jesus too – not to mention solving the mysteries of the Holy Grail, the Turin Shroud and the Ark of the Covenant. TED HARRISON reports on a man who makes Indiana Jones and Dan Brown look like lightweights…

TED HARRISON is a former BBC religious affairs correspondent, long-time *FT* contributor and author of many books, including *Apocalypse When?*, now available from Darton, Longman & Todd.

Exactly *where* the bodies are hidden, Michael Goldsworthy isn't telling; but that the remains of Joseph of Arimathea and possibly Jesus himself are buried on an island off the Devon coast is not, in Goldsworthy's mind, in any doubt.

Up until now, Burgh Island has been known for its Art Deco hotel and its connections with the crime writer Agatha Christie. Soon, it could be at the centre of a controversy that will rock the core teaching of the Christian church. At least, this is what Michael Goldsworthy expects, should archæologists be given permission to examine the place where he is convinced the secrets lie buried.

The claim is based on Goldsworthy's interpretation of an ancient Latin riddle attributed to a monk named Melkin who lived over 1,500 years ago. Melkin claimed that somewhere on the island of Avalon, the island later famous in Arthurian legend, lies the tomb of that enigmatic character from the Bible, supposedly Jesus's uncle, Joseph of Arimathea. Avalon, if it's not seen as an entirely mythical place, is associated with Glastonbury. This was the version of the story supported by the mediæval monks of the abbey there. It was a profitable legend to promote. When Melkin wrote in his riddle that it would be on Avalon that "Joseph of Arimathea has found perpetual sleep in a marble tomb" it was assumed he was referring to somewhere in the vicinity of the Abbey or Tor.

Melkin gave further clues as to the exact location of the tomb, but they are cryptic. "He lies on two forked lines next to the southern angle of an oratory, where the wattle is prepared above the mighty maiden and where the aforesaid 13 spheres rest. For Joseph has with him in his sarcophagus two vessels white and silver, filled with the blood and sweat of the prophet Jesus. When his sarcophagus is discovered, it will be seen whole and untouched, and will be opened to the whole world."

ABOVE: Leonardo's *Madonna and the Yarnwinder*.

LEFT: Joseph of Arimathea "among the rocks of Albany".

It's Goldsworthy's contention that Avalon has been misidentified. It is, he argues, the same place as another island of legend – Ictis, famed for its role in the tin trade. Only by correctly interpreting Melkin, says Goldsworthy, can Avalon/Ictis's true location be found.

Melkin's clues, according to Goldsworthy, involve an understanding of leys, those supposedly invisible straight lines of energy allegedly known to the Neolithic inhabitants of Britain and rediscovered in the 20th century, first by Alfred Watkins and then by a host of modern geomancers and dowsers.

Overlaying leys on maps of southern Britain and interpreting the geometric shapes created, Goldsworthy says that he can make sense of Melkin's riddle – and that the clues all point to a tidal island at the mouth of the River Avon near Bigbury in Devon – Burgh Island.

So what does he expect to find there? Enough amazing evidence to solve almost every Christian mystery and put a metaphorical bombshell under the traditional Christian creeds that Jesus died on the Cross, was resurrected from the dead and ascended into Heaven. Not only that, but the mysteries of the Holy Grail, the Turin Shroud and possibly the Ark of the Covenant will also be solved!

It's Indiana Jones meets Dan Brown, with a vengeance.

And the reason why all this astonishing evidence should have found its way to Britain, says Goldsworthy, is to do with the historic connections between the British Isles and the ancient Hebrews. He believes in a version of a curious – and now unfashionable – idea which once fascinated Victorian Society. In many ways, it was a British version of Mormonism that failed to take root. The British Israelites claimed that in Old Testament times the lost tribes of Israelites had settled in Britain. It was they who established the trading links between the West

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Country and the Middle East, recalled in West Country folk tales concerning Joseph of Arimathea being a tin trader. Michael Goldsworthy finds the theory convincing. He cites one very interesting coincidence. Genesis Chapter 38 tells a story concerning Judah, the son of Jacob and founder of the most famous of the 12 Tribes of Israel, and his daughter-in-law, who is called Tamar. Her name, of course, is shared with the River Tamar that divides Devon from Cornwall.

So what does Goldsworthy think happened 2,000 years ago?

"After the crucifixion, Joseph managed to obtain Jesus's body and supposedly collected his blood and sweat into one or two receptacles and brought them with him to England; and for all the Grail's multitudinous depictions, it is the connection with Jesus that is the one unchanging theme. The vessel or vessels supposedly now lie with Joseph of Arimathea in an undiscovered sepulchre on mainland Britain."

Advancing over 1,000 years to the time of the Knights Templar, the religious order of warriors about whom so many legends have grown up, Goldsworthy believes they must have known about the hiding place where the bodies of Jesus and later, his uncle, were laid to rest. For, in 1307, he maintains, three ships arrived off the island bringing sacred treasures from the Holy Land to secrete in this special place. They took away with them the shroud as a relic and souvenir. The Christmas carol 'I saw three ships' is said to originate from this visit, as the ships sailed in on Christmas day to attract the least attention.

"The Templars were aware of the island of Ictis," Goldsworthy writes in his book, "and they also knew that it 'coveted' in its vaults, deep within, the bodies of Jesus and Joseph of Arimathea. They were also fully aware that the island of Avalon held the remains of the wounded body of King Arthur… The Grail romances that the Templars themselves had propagated bore witness to a consolidated body of knowledge connecting the British and the most famous members of the Davidic Royal line in recent history. It is with this certain knowledge that had been conveyed to the Templars through the manuscript of Melkin's Book of the Grail in France that the knights journeyed to Jerusalem to uncover what was known to exist under the Temple of Solomon upon which the Al-Aqsa Mosque had been built."

What happened to the Templars and their ships subsequently is unknown.

SUPERSTOCK

ABOVE: A view of Burgh Island, off the Devon coast.

Leonardo was in the know and painted Burgh Island

However, their secret did not die with them. Goldsworthy maintains that Leonardo da Vinci was in the know and painted images of Burgh Island and the river estuary into his two versions of the painting 'Madonna of the Yarnwinder'. The landscape of his painting 'Virgin and the Rocks' is also, he says, identifiable as that of Burgh Island.

The island today is owned by hoteliers Deborah Clark and Tony Orchard. They say they are aware of Michael Goldsworthy's theory but are not willing to associate themselves with it. "Were there any significant remains of any kind, they would have been unearthed, or at least vague evidence would have surfaced during our works. There was some excavation in the early part of the last decade but – after getting very excited about King Arthur etc – it transpired that the footprint was that of the 1930s crazy golf course."

NOTES

And Did Those Feet by Michael Goldsworthy is published by Matador at £49.95.

Michael Goldsworthy admits he is neither historian nor archæologist, and is aware that the experts will be utterly dismissive of his research. He lives on the mainland close by the island and is so convinced that he has unravelled the greatest secret of the last two millennia that he has deposited his findings with the local coroner as a legal safeguard, as both hidden bodies and buried treasure are involved. All he wants is permission to test his theory. He says he is prepared to risk public ridicule, should archæologists excavate and find nothing, but is confident that he knows exactly where to look.

What undermines Goldsworthy's claims, as far as the sceptics and mainstream scholars are concerned, is their all-embracing nature. To suggest Joseph of Arimathea is on the island is one thing; to say that so is Jesus, the Holy Grail, Templar treasure, and possibly the Ark of the Covenant and the solution to the mystery of the Turin Shroud (and Leonardo knew all about it) stretches the credulity of even the most determined believer.

And even that's not all!

Once the tomb is unveiled and the Ark of the Covenant and the body of Jesus are found together, "it may bring peace to the Nations," reckons Goldsworthy.

To solve several of the world's greatest religious mysteries and the Middle East crisis all in one go – it's got to be worth a try, surely? FT

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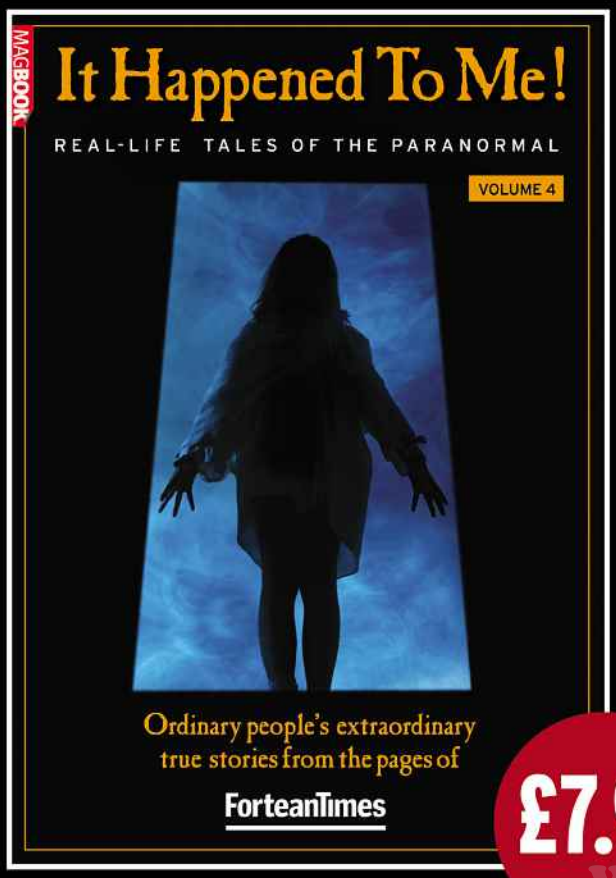

IT HAPPENED TO ME VOLUME 4

FortеanTimes

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reviews

Wonderfull witchy discoverie

Modern scholarship fleshes out the beliefs and lives of the skilled practitioners of a dangerous trade who were the victims of witchcraft accusations 400 years ago

Wicked Enchantments
Joyce Froome

Palatine Books (carnegiepublishing.com) 2010
Pb, 404pp, illus, notes, bib, ind, £9.99,
ISBN 9781874181620
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £9.49

August 2012 marked the 400th anniversary of the execution of the Pendle Witches, one of the most notorious examples of official brutality and prejudice towards those accused of witchcraft in Britain. Joyce Froome, of the Museum of Witchcraft in Boscastle, Cornwall, who specialises in the history of witchcraft and magic, retells this tragedy with modern scholarship for a modern audience.

Pendle Hill looms over the surrounding moors, and boasts a Bronze Age burial at its bleak summit. It was where George Fox had a vision, in 1652, which led him to found the Quaker movement; but it has wider fame for the witch trials which took place in its shadow in 1612, memories of which, today, draw hundreds of visitors to climb it every Hallowe'en. Locals call it, simply, 'Pendle' (which combines two old words of Cumbric and Old English, both meaning 'hill', rendering the third 'hill' unnecessary).

The story begins with a trivial incident before spiralling outwards in compounded jeopardy. Near the village of Colne, not 10 miles east of Pendle, an itinerant peddler called John Law encountered a teenaged girl called Alizon Device. She wanted to buy some pins, and when he refused to sell them, the girl became very angry. He began to walk away and fell down, suddenly and inexplicably lame. He stumbled to an inn, where he lay with all the symptoms we might attribute to a stroke. Law's son was sent for and he concluded that Alizon had cursed his father and took the incident to Roger Nowell, the local magistrate.

Nowell had long kept an eye on Alizon's family. Her grandmother, Elizabeth Southerns, known as Old Demdike, was a notorious witch feared throughout the Forest of Pendle. Demdike, her children and grandchildren all openly practised what Froome here calls 'spellcraft', "a strange fusion of Christian and pre-Christian elements" using spells, charms and concoctions to address many everyday problems and illnesses. To a religious and educated man like Nowell, the fact that they called on supernatural forces that he believed were evil presented a danger to his world and society. It is likely that the peddler knew of them too and, accosted by a young witch, did not want to sell her pins she would probably use for cursing magic, and tried to move on. His fear quite probably triggered his collapse.

Seizing the opportunity, Nowell arrested most of Demdike's family and known associates; and the same of another local witch, Anne Whittle, known as Chattox. After he had gained confessions from most of them, altogether 16 women of various ages and four men were detained for trial at the Lancaster assizes. Both Demdike and Chattox were blind and in their 80s and freely confessed to Nowell; however, there seems to be evidence that he had to groom his star witness, Alizon's nine-year-old sister Jennet. Under relentless questioning and in mortal fear, members of both 'rival covens' implicated each other, their own friends and relatives, and some others (who seem to have fled to save their lives). On 20 August 1612, 10 were hanged – including Chattox and her daughter, the teenagers Alizon Device and her brother James, and their mother (Demdike's daughter) – accused of around 16 murders by witchcraft. Old Mother Demdike herself died awaiting trial.

> **"Cunning men and wise women used their charms and curses with convincing clarity"**

Where most other accounts rest on a direct account of the trials – *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches…* written by the court officer, Thomas Potts, on the order of the judges – and the rather stereotyped view of the witches, Joyce Froome's fleshes out the lives and beliefs of most of the central figures. Drawing on historical documents and her knowledge of practical witchcraft, she evokes the world of cunning men and wise women who daily used their wits and inherited knowledge of remedies, charms and curses with convincing clarity.

They were not "superstitious idiots", she writes, but practising a trade – albeit a dangerous one – that was valued by Pendle villagers as much as they feared the witch families. This region of Lancashire was notoriously "wild and lawless"; it was also largely Catholic, which probably accounts for the 'voodoo Catholicism' elements of the regional folk beliefs. Froome makes a case that the cunning men and women – nothing like as organised as Margaret Murray's discredited witch-cult theory suggests, or the advance-guard of anti-Christian spies and saboteurs feared by the likes of Nowell – often acted as the villagers' "main defence against witches".

There was no serious evidence that any of them had actually committed any of the murders attributed to them beyond unsupported mutual accusations and general fears. These were the days of spectral evidence, assumptions, prejudices almost completely without any kind of forensics. In one case, the accused was damned when the corpse of her alleged victim bled in her presence.

Wicked Enchantments may be two years old, but it is a timely read, unencumbered by an intrusive scholarly apparatus (that's kept to the back of the book). Froome has humanised these historical figures with impressive skill. She sheds similar light on their theory and practice, their world of spirits and demons, fairies and familiars, and the more distant world of 17th-century theologians, lawyers and scholars.

Bob Rickard

Fortean Times Verdict
EXCELLENT ACCOUNT OF A BLACK PERIOD IN LANCASHIRE HISTORY **8**

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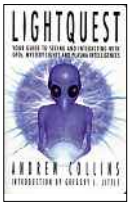
Lights! Action!

Some fascinating accounts of mysterious lights, but what's with the wacko cover?



Lightquest

Your Guide to Seeing and Interacting with UFOs, Mystery Lights and Plasma Intelligences

Andrew Collins

Andrewcollins.com

Pb, 416pp, £14.99, ISBN 9780940829497

AVAILABLE FROM WWW.ANDREWCOLLINS.COM/

I really don't do UFOs – I rarely read about them and certainly don't go 'questing' for them. However, Andrew Collins's latest book has a personal interest for me. *Lightquest* contains many fascinating first-hand accounts of mysterious lights, seen from various hotspots in the USA and Britain. These include Roswell, Marfa, Allagash and my own part of Wiltshire. I lived in Alton Barnes, centre of the crop circle phenomenon, throughout the 1990s; I know all of Collins's witnesses there personally and can vouch for their sincerity. Though I have never seen any myself, there are many reliable reports from locals of anomalous lights in the sky that are certainly not military, and of glowing balls that emerge from the ground and sometimes whizz off at absurd speeds. Circle-makers have also claimed to see such things while working out in the fields at night.

Collins begins by establishing his belief that 'nuts and bolts' UFOs do not exist, which seems reasonable. But lamenting the current state of ufology, he describes a visit to the Roswell International UFO Museum & Research Center, with its cornucopia of tacky flying saucer memorabilia, as "disheartening". It sounds brilliant to me. So what are UFOs then? *Lightquest* is partly dedicated to Paul Devereux, "whose Earth Lights theory made me believe anew". After acknowledging Dev's geological hypothesis and Jung's view of flying saucers as humanly-generated archetypes, Collins then extols his own theory of what he terms "lightology".

In centuries past, unexplained lights in the sky may have been interpreted as witchcraft, the work of the Devil or fairies; today we have quantum theory, plasma intelligences and orgone energy – modern magic. Collins claims that some mysterious balls of light are sentient, and will interact with humans. Although he enthusiastically gives instructions for "light-questing" based on this principle, I would have thought that on health and safety grounds, it is best not to try deliberately to attract rapidly-moving balls of super-heated gas. And how do they get to be super-heated in the first place? I failed to grasp this, despite Collins's attempts to explain "this whole ionising process, known as ionisation…"

Lightquest comes as a robust paperback with rounded corners and a waterproof cover, in the style of a pocket field guide but twice the usual size. However, it is not something I would be seen dead carrying around New Mexico, or anywhere else. Reading the book on a plane, I found myself embarrassedly hiding the front cover from other passengers – it sports a bug-eyed alien, surrounded by exploding plasma, and just *screams* wacko. This is unfortunate, as the book is far more interesting than its cover suggests. It is certainly worth reading, for the well-researched witness accounts alone. As John Michell used to say, we can never explain a genuine mystery – we can only enter into it.

Steve Marshall

Fortean Times Verdict

SOME WELL RESEARCH WITNESS ACCOUNTS (AND A FEW LACUNÆ) **4**

The Self Illusion

Why There Is No 'You' Inside Your Head

Bruce Hood

Constable 2012

Pb, 258 pp, £12.99, ISBN 9781780330075

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £11.69

If it looks like Bruce Hood, walks like Bruce Hood, writes like Bruce Hood, and says that it's Bruce Hood, you might think that it's Bruce Hood. But no. Bruce Hood is an illusion. What 'he' is, is a collection of experiences and influences that a network of neurones inside 'his' head has branded 'him'.

Unless 'his' neurones integrated everything that has happened to 'him' into the compelling but fictional narrative that 'he' calls 'himself', there would be a massive processing problem. The self, then, is a convenient but delusional summary; a headline that can't possibly do justice to the tangled complexity of the story.

Like everyone else, Hood can't do without personal pronouns. There are plenty of 'I's. He tells us insistently about 'his' views; he acknowledges 'his' friends. The book is an attempt to explain why this is gibberish.

The fact that he is writing a highly personal and self-aware book to demonstrate this is a wonderful, and wonderfully ironic, illustration of the problem of consciousness or subjectivity – the philosophers' 'hard problem'. The problem is hard because is it impossible to conceive of any way in which it might be solved, or even probed.

Any experiment to observe, weigh or measure the subjective must be so hopelessly contaminated with the subjective that it's worthless. Most neuroscientists and philosophers acknowledge the difficulty. But Hood is unfazed. I suppose that a fazed Hood would never have written the book at all. And that would have been a shame.

We'd have missed a highly readable, accessible, entertaining and erudite catalogue of the evidence for Hume's 'bundle theory' of consciousness – a theory popularised by, amongst others, Daniel Dennett.

All the main strands of evidence are here: brain plasticity, the exotic ontological crises produced by organic brain disease and injury, our highly selective memories, our astonishing capacity for self-deception, our worrying corruptibility, and so on. It's a nicely curated and sometimes dazzling museum of all the jewels in the reductionist crown.

It's compendious, and therefore the sense of dissatisfaction that's left when you finish the book is all the more significant.

What does it all add up to?

That some things that happen to the structure of our neurones, or their ability to function, can affect the way we perceive our place in the Universe. That proposition falls a long way short of establishing the reductionist case. So there's some sort of mysterious relationship between healthy embodiment and a sense of self?

Barring the more hysterical Gnostics, such as Augustine, whoever suggested otherwise? So we're unaware of some of the errors of our own perception, and more susceptible to outside influences than we think?

Fine, but mistakes and suggestibility don't imply that there's no self to be hoodwinked.

One of the great things about Hood's book is that it can be read fast. You'll quickly be able to see the size and disposition of the whole reductionist arsenal. And that will let you appreciate, as few other books can, just how sickening for the reductionists is the problem of consciousness. They've got bows and arrows against atomic weapons.

They've got a few neurological curiosities of uncertain philosophical significance ranged queasily against the ubiquitous 'I', and against love, poems, music, religious conviction, and the fact that Hood dedicates his book to his wife.

Buy it, read it, be unconvinced, and return more confidently to being yourself.

Charles Foster

Fortean Times Verdict

READABLE STAB AT UNRAVELLING A VERY KNOTTY CONUNDRUM **9**

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The Last Myth

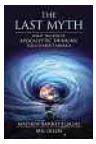
What the Rise of Apocalyptic Thinking Tells us About America

Matthew Barrett Gross & Mel Gilles

Prometheus Books 2012

Pb, 254pp, notes, ind, $18.00/£15.99
ISBN 9781616145736

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £15.29



This is something of a mish-mash, and it's faintly surprising to see it issued by a generally rigorous publisher like Prometheus. It isn't a bad book, far from it – but, as Noel Coward's Alice thought while observing the beasts of the field, things could have been organised better. And then the book would have been a deal slimmer, as it's essentially a one-notion argument inflated by repetition and rhetoric and a tendency to ramble. You have to pick your way from one good bit to another.

Gross and Gilles (spousal associates) start with an overview of American apocalyptic thinking in the Noughties, followed by a useful critique of those who impose the fashionable values of the present on past societies, to produce meaningless critiques or solipsistic assumptions. Their focus, inevitably, is on the promised Great Change of 21 December 2012, and they do a good job of tweaking New Agers' tails on this: the Maya, they point out with good-humoured acidity, were patently not interested in us or our times, and to think otherwise is narcissistic (in the psychoanalytic sense, one might add).

Their account of New Age grandiosity reminds one of Mrs Jellyby's 'telescopic philanthropy': when the authors' local community decided to prepare for "the looming energy crisis", nearly everyone wanted to "plan for the time twenty years out when oil… would be a scarcity; almost no one wanted to get together to insulate the houses of the town's poor the following week." Sometimes one does reach reflexively for one's revolver.

Similarly, they show clearly that apocalyptic thinking isn't an intrinsic, habitual mode of human thought. Thus Gross and Gilles take us to and through the roots and development of apocalypticism (better done by John Michael Greer in *Apocalypse Not*) in general, and in particular in the US – although the authors constantly refer to 'humanity' when they mean people in the post-Renaissance West.

The heart of the book stems from the mildly contentious proposition that "widespread belief in some kind of apocalypse is the defining cultural phenomenon of our time… offering the promise that the chaos of our times will eventually prove to have some kind of redemptive meaning." That is the 'last myth' of their title – and the upshot is that Americans are divided between carrying on as usual 'irregardless', and anticipating that redemptive end. Attitudes have more to do with vindicating existing beliefs or ways of life than making realistic provision for a possible end to the American Dream and the American Way. And so no one addresses the real problems – which, in the authors' own somewhat apocalyptically expressed view, are an impending energy crisis, global warming, and the fragility of paper money.

Those are sharp points, even if they ignore the development of shale oil and growing doubts over anthropogenic global warming (bankers remain irredeemable), as well as the dozens of other things that also threaten the Western way of life, and perhaps more immediately.

Then Gross and Gilles almost unconsciously present an answer to the conundrum presented by entrenched beliefs confronted by unprecedented change.

As they say, "if the true alternative to our worldview comes into fruition, it will reach above and beyond our current worldview… it smashes those structures to pieces."

Nietzsche said the future is a dangerous business. Alfred E Neumann said, "What, me worry?"

Those two views are less incompatible than the authors seem to recognise.

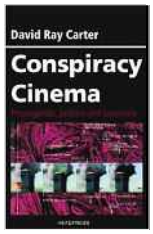
Peter Brookesmith

Fortean Times Verdict

A CURATE'S EGG, ODDLY WELL COOKED NONETHELESS **7**

Paranoid films

Kudos to the author for wading through lo- and no-budget intellectual garbage



Conspiracy Cinema

Propaganda, politics and paranoia

David Ray Carter

Headpress 2012 (www.worldheadpress.com)

Pb, 271pp, illus, refs, ind, £13.99, $19.95,
ISBN 9781900486811

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £12.59

How things have changed! Not so long ago, 'conspiracy cinema' would have meant Hollywood movies from the 1970s such as the *Parallax View* or *Three Days of the Condor*, British equivalents such as Ken Loach's *Hidden Agenda* and the TV series *Edge of Darkness*, and Italian thrillers such as *Illustrious Corpses*. That 'conspiracy cinema' reflected anxieties on the liberal-left at the growing power of the secret state in our societies.

These days, such films don't get made so often (the 1998 *Enemy of the State*, starring Will Smith, being a rare exception) and in the author's survey 'conspiracy cinema' now means largely low- or zero-budget expressions of the themes of the Anglo-American conspirasphere on the Net. Once they wrote pamphlets; now they make documentary films (if that isn't too grand a description of many of them, which are purely propagandist in aim) and post them on the Net and sell them as DVDs.

A collection of short reviews like this presents obvious reviewing difficulties: I have seen few of the films he discusses, but his opinions of the handful I know seem reasonable. If anything, he's probably too kind to many of them; but then he could hardly write a book whose central message was "Almost all of this stuff is crap", could he? So maybe there's a bit of misplaced generosity here and there.

Is the survey comprehensive? I have no idea. All I can report is that at least 95 per cent of them were new to me and there are no obvious items on the agenda of the conspirasphere which he has omitted. But I'm probably the wrong person to be doing this. I don't regard film and video as information media: they're too slow and the data presented is too difficult to extract if you want it. I want data that I can copy/cut/paste. Films and video don't work that way.

So a big tip of the hat (and commiserations) to the author for the hundreds of hours he has spent watching mostly intellectual garbage on our behalf.

If nothing else, he will bring to his readers' attention *Evidence of Revision*, eight hours of film on the assassinations of the 1960s to be found on Youtube, which is a major piece of work by any standards.

Robin Ramsay

Fortean Times Verdict

THE AUTHOR WATCHED THESE FILMS SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO **5**

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Crackpot vs egghead

Dreams may not come true, but this is a highly entertaining study of some colourful manimal hunters (or were they spies?)

Searching for Sasquatch

Crackpots, Eggheads, and Cryptozoology

Brian Regal

Palgrave Macmillan 2011

Hb, 262pp, notes, bib, ind, £58.00, ISBN 9780230111479

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKCLUB PRICE £58.00

The heroic narrative of anomalous primate-hunting, espoused by the likes of Ivan Sanderson and René Dahinden, pits the passionate amateur naturalists ('crackpots') against the blinkered baddies, career academics ('eggheads'), but the situation has always been much more nuanced, with quite a few 'eggheads' – such as Carleton Coon, Gordon 'Grover' Krantz, John Napier and Boris Porshnev – believing in the existence of anomalous near-men and making great efforts to find the proof. The favoured academic hypothesis is that these 'manimals' are descendants of prehistoric primates known from fossils, such as *Gigantopithecus* or the Neanderthals. The 1950s and 1960s were a golden age of cooperation between crackpots and eggheads in this field. Frustratingly, the alleged evidence for Bigfoot and his cousins – as in so many branches of forteana – is ambivalent at best. "This story tells of dreams that do not come true" is the first sentence of this entertaining book.

Brian Regal, assistant professor of the history of science at Kean University, New Jersey, concentrates on the hairy-hominid-hunters, not the objectivity of their prey, about which he reserves judgement. He surveys the colourful characters who have searched for Yeti and Almasti in Central Asia and Sasquatch in North America over the last half-century, but doesn't cover those seeking 'manimals' elsewhere, such as Orang-pendek in Indonesia, the Yeren in China, or the Yowie in Australia.

The Yeti was first mentioned in Western literature in 1832, but the hunt for the "Abominable Snowman" only really took off after the publication of Eric Shipton's footprint photos in 1951. I love the hypothesis that 'Yeti' comes from the Sherpa word *meh-the*, meaning "that thing there". The murky Cold War connections of many Yeti-hunters in the Himalayas make an intriguing story; Yeti-hunting could be seen as a cover for espionage. As Prof. Regal puts it: "Carlton Coon spied on Tom Slick, who may have been a spy himself. Coon worked with Slick, but did not trust him, nor did he care for Peter Byrne, another alleged agent. Coon told fellow spy George Agognino to watch himself around Slick, and Agognino heartily agreed." It puts one in mind of GK Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday*.

While Sasquatch is a Native American word first brought to prominence in the 1930s, the modern era of Bigfoot-hunting kicked off with the footprints found at Bluff Creek, California, in 1958. Then there's the strange case of the Minnesota Iceman, which surfaced on the American carnival circuit in 1968. It fooled both Ivan Sanderson and Bernard Heuvelmans – whose fervent wishful thinking overcame their better judgement – and dealt a severe blow to the reputation of Bigfoot studies [see **FT83:34–37**].

However, the mantle was taken up by the American palæoanthropologist Grover Krantz, a central character in Prof. Regal's narrative. Krantz spent over 30 years attempting to prove the existence of anomalous primates using the techniques of physical anthropology and evolutionary theory; but it was ultimately a vain endeavour, his university colleagues continuing to view Sasquatch as a relic of folklore or an outright hoax. A further handicap was Krantz's ignorance (or avoidance) of the latest scholarship in biology and biochemistry, making him appear curiously old-fashioned. Throughout his career, "Krantz found himself caught between the eggheads he wanted to convince and the crackpots he wanted to both exploit and distance himself from."

The author devotes a chapter to the story of the 1967 Patterson Bigfoot film, and another to the Russian hunt for crypto-primates (Almasti in the Pamirs, Almas in Mongolia) – a comparatively little-known enterprise beginning when the Mongolian ethnologist Badzar Baradiin (or Baradyine) caught sight of an Almas in 1906. There's also the intriguing legend of Zana, supposedly an Almasti captured in the Caucasus and kept locked up by a nobleman called Genada near the town of Tkhina until her death around 1880.

Ironically, while the crackpots zealously guard their collections of dubious and inconsistent footprint plaster-casts, Prof. Regal says that "more scientists than ever now take seriously the idea of anomalous primates". As I write, the Oxford–Lausanne Collateral Hominid Project is examining hairs, scat etc. purporting to come from anomalous primates [see Alien Zoo **FT291:23**]; a team of 38 researchers has begun a new hunt for China's Yeren or 'Wild Man' in Shennongjia forest, Hubei province; and in Australia, a witness claims to have video'd a Yowie and its footprints in the Blue Mountains near Springwood, west of Sydney, on 8 March 2011.

Paul Sieveking

Fortean Times Verdict

INFORMATIVE SURVEY OF HOPE TRUMPING DISAPPOINTMENT **8**

Volcano

Nature & Culture

James Hamilton

Reaktion Books 2012

Pb, 208pp, illus, £14.95, ISBN 9781861899170

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKCLUB PRICE £13.45

Waterfall

Nature & Culture

Brian J Hudson

Reaktion Books 2012

Pb, 248pp, illus, £14.95, ISBN 9781861899187

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKCLUB PRICE £13.45

A nice idea from Reaktion Books: a series of volumes on different aspects of the Earth Sciences, and how they have impacted on human culture. The first two deal with volcanoes and waterfalls, both of which lend themselves as subjects for the visual arts. Both are effectively coffee-table books in small paperback format, heavily illustrated.

Volcano has a fascinating collection of paintings, many unfamiliar, but the text is awful – clunking and wildly inaccurate. *Waterfall* is better written, but the pictures are less remarkable, being mostly photographs.

Roger Musson

Fortean Times Verdict

VOLCANO: ADMIRE, DON'T READ **4**

WATERFALL: SERIOUS ACCOUNT **6**

Cox's Fragmenta

An Historical Miscellany

Ed: Simon Murphy

The History Press 2012

Hb, 158pp, illus, £9.99, ISBN 9780752451718

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKCLUB PRICE £9.49

In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, Francis Cox, an early Charles Fort, plundered newspapers for the weird and wonderful. This distillation includes a Sapient Pig, a frog barometer, boating and parachuting cats, an enormous otter, a match between one-legged and one-armed cricketers, the first recorded meteorite fall and much more. The perfect loo book.

William Darragh

Fortean Times Verdict

SMALL BUT PERFECTLY FORMED COLLECTION OF ODDITIES **8**

WorldMags.net

ALSO RECEIVED

We leaf through a small selection of the dozens of books that have arrived at Fortean Towers in recent months...

UFOs CAUGHT ON FILM

B J Booth

David & Charles (fwmedia.co.uk) 2011
Hb, pp159, index, illus, £12.99
ISBN 9781446301692

From the oldest known UFO photograph – a monochrome stereo view of Mt Washington showing an apparent UFO – through to the present day, Booth presents around 80 UFO photos, some well known and many of which have not been published before. Each image is accompanied by a compact description, and while there's not much room for analysis or possible explanation, it's a nice addition to the *Caught On Film* series.

THE LOST EMPIRE OF ATLANTIS

Gavin Menzies

Swordfish (orionbooks.co.uk) 2011
Hb, pp374, index, plates, £20.00
ISBN 9780857820068

Here the author of the hugely successful *1421* (on the voyages of the Chinese Admiral Zheng He) turns his historical interests towards the ancient enigma of Atlantis. Menzies reviews all the usual evidence from the point of view of a Royal Navy commander, and with the thoroughness of his experience of seafaring and navigation, coming to a conclusion that many historians of the subject have rejected or treated with caution. For Menzies, the myriad myths of Atlantis centred on the huge success of the Minoan trading empire which flourished for nearly 2,000 years before it was ended with the eruption of Thera (now Santorini) around 1450 BC (that is the widely accepted date although some tree-ring and other indicators suggest the late 1620s BC). He also uses sources other historians have not – ancient wrecks and their salvage, new discoveries in geology and archæology, and DNA studies of the Minoan diaspora. They had warnings, Menzies argues, and days before the eruption evacuated most of the population to Crete (the lack of human remains at Santorini seems to confirm this), but then the true disaster struck when the volcano finally exploded and a huge tsunami hit the northern coast of Crete destroying the last Minoan refuge. This is gripping stuff, well argued... and along the way solves the mystery of who constructed the many copper mines in Canada's Great Lakes area...

SCIENCIA

various authors

Wooden Books (woodenbooks.com) 2011
Hb, pp410, index, £14.99
ISBN: 9781907155123

What a perfect little encyclopædia this is! It combines a revision and expansion of six of the Wooden Books titles on science topics, but in a larger format. It includes the beauty of mathematic and scientific proofs; useful maths and physics formulæ; all about the elements, evolution (with many examples), the human body and how it works, and finally, astronomy and the Universe. The expositions themselves have been tightly argued to fit single pages by experts in their subjects and the famous Wooden Books quirky illustrative style has been kept. It's beautifully printed, clearly explained and eccentric enough to lure any young mind into understanding the principles of science.

THE MOST AMAZING PLACES OF FOLKLORE & LEGEND IN BRITAIN

Reader's Digest

Reader's Digest (readersdigest.co.uk) 2011
Pb, pp223, index, illus, £19.99.
ISBN 9781780200071

This is a county-by-county gazetteer of places with strong folkloric connections covering England, Wales and Scotland (but not Northern Ireland). It's not a patch on the early books by Janet and Colin Bord on the same topic, but is lavishly illustrated with colour photographs and finely printed. It's more of a coffee table book but still has some fascinating locations and lore.

ROBIN HOOD

Nick Rennison

Pocket Essentials (pocketessentials.com) 2012
Pb, pp160, index, bib, £7.99
ISBN: 9781842432471

It is likely that stories about Robin Hood first sprang up in the 14th century (**FT259:34–39**), but his legend and image are with us still, six centuries later, perpetuated in the names of pubs, movies, folk songs, place names and even electronic games. Much of what we think we know about him was first introduced by Walter Scott's 1820 novel *Ivanhoe* and subsequently developed by later writers and filmmakers. This fact-packed review of the myth, history and culture of England's best known folk hero is a fascinating book. Rennison begins with a review of the early ballads, and makes a good case for the survival of the mythology through several centuries when Robin became a popular character in local plays, games and revels associated with Beltane and the May Games at Whitsuntide. Some of this material convinced folklorist Margaret Murray that Robin must have been the high priest of an extensive wiccan cult. The author then searches for evidence of a historical progenitor before reviewing the variants of the legend in modern media. This would make a great introduction to how to separate out folklore from historical fact for a young mind.

FORTEAN FICTION

King of Thorns (Broken Empire Vol 2)

Mark Lawrence

HarperVoyager, 2012
Hb, pp384, £14.99
ISBN 9780007439034

And so, in this eagerly awaited second book in the Broken Empire series, King Jorg, now ruler of the Renar Highlands, rides again. After the events of *Prince of Thorns*, here Jorg and his motley crew of warriors make their way towards a battle with their newly arisen enemy, the Prince of Arrow, and, even more surprisingly, a marriage of convenience to Princess Miana – an event that must rank as about as credible as bankers being found to be honest.

King of Thorns is clearly the middle section of an epic tale, but it's a bigger and more confident book. Fans of the first novel will appreciate this expansion of the previous narrative, for although it is still overridingly a dark and extremely violent vengeance tale, here Lawrence fills in more of the wider geography of Jorg's post-apocalyptic land. On the downside, however, this grander world-building does make the book sag a little in the middle of its travelogue.

Perhaps most impressive here is the fact that Jorg has become an engaging dichotomy, a psychotic monster capable of great violence but with the the charismatic presence of a politician. While the younger Prince Jorg was comparatively rather base and crude, this new King Jorg, although only 18, is cleverer, subtler and more devious in order to reach his goal, revenge for the death of his brother and mother. It is this that keeps the pages turning.

The ending has a nice twist, and ultimately leads the reader to wonder further if such an apparently unpleasant character as Jorg can be redeemed – a theme which undoubtedly will be explored further in the next book.

Mark Yon

WorldMags.net

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30 CLEVELAND STREET, LONDON W1T 4JD, UK.

Tower Block

Dir James Nunn and Ronnie Thompson, UK 2012
On UK release from 21 September

Last year the low-budget British sci-fi horror comedy *Attack the Block* charmed audiences [not me – Ed], put rookie director Joe Cornish on the map and schooled us in South London street slang.

With *Tower Block*, directors James Nunn and Ronnie Thompson take us to a similarly run-down estate in London's East End, but have swapped alien invasions for a crazed sniper and kept most of the action indoors. It all kicks off when the tenants of an apartment building witness the ruthless beating of a young boy in their corridor. When the police call round for questioning, the locals clam up and refuse to cooperate; they simply wish to maintain the status quo and be left alone, but peace and normality become a thing of the past when, a few months later, a mysterious gunman shows up hell-bent on blowing everyone's brains out.

As first features go, *Tower Block* is a strong, confident debut for Nunn and Thompson, who make great use of their confined surroundings and talented British cast to deliver a bold, tense thriller. It's not entirely action-packed: the tenants are too often seen sitting around ruminating about the murder mystery and their lives, and a real sense of urgency and feeling is occasionally missing as they search for a way out. Despite this – and a consistent use of the tried and tested theme of the rebellious victim who thinks he or she can beat the odds (have this bunch never watched a teenage horror flick?) – there are enough suspenseful passages and well-engineered death sequences to keep you engaged until the end. The film is, however, let down by a disappointing throwaway reveal that will frustrate many of those who have stuck with it. Overall, though, it's an impressive first foray showcasing homegrown talent in our own grimy backyard.

Fohnjang Ghebdinga

Fortean Times Verdict
STYLISH EAST END THRILLER THAT PACKS A PUNCH OR TWO **7**

Total Recall: Ultimate Rekall Edition

Dir Paul Verhoeven, US 1990
StudioCanal, £24.99 (triple-play)

It doesn't really matter whether the new *Total Recall* (with Colin Farrell replacing Arnold Schwarzenegger) is a remake of this 1990 original or a re-adaptation of the Philip K Dick source story: they're both blockbuster action adventure movies built on the central core of an idea. There is one scene vital to both movies, when everyman Doug Quaid is being persuaded that what he's experiencing isn't reality, that he's still locked into the Rekall dream machine… or is he? This dilemma is the central point of Dick's story, and it's the heart of the film. While Arnie might not be anyone's idea of an everyman figure, he plays confusion well enough. When confronted by Roy Brocksmith's supercilious Dr Edgemar and Sharon Stone's creepy Lori trying to persuade him to return to 'reality', Arnie handles the moment as only the Austrian Oak could, buying our goodwill for the rest of the action-adventure nonsense that follows.

The 'is it real, or is it fake' question is central to much of Dick's fiction, and remains central to the best movies adapted from it, whether the question is about people (*Blade Runner*) or the world they live in (*Total Recall*). Over 20 years on, Verhoeven's often hysterical version still stands up, being both thrilling and entertaining (even if often cheesy, mostly thanks to Arnie). New extras include an interview with the director, alongside a commentary from Verhoeven and Schwarzenegger, and 'making of' and special effects features.

Brian J Robb

Fortean Times Verdict
STILL A FEAST FOR FANS OF FAKE REALITIES **8**

The Devil's Business

Dir Sean Hogan, UK 2011
Metrodome, £15.99

The Devil's Business, Sean Hogan's home-grown horror movie, left me in two minds. On the one hand, you could argue that it's an inventive little low-budget chiller of a kind that's always welcome; on the other, that it's a thin premise padded beyond its intrinsic interest.

A pair of hitmen turn up at an empty house to bump off an old associate of their boss (a central casting bald Cockney villain). Pinner (Billy Clarke) is a quiet-spoken, veteran Irish hitman with a passion for order, while Cully (Jack Gordon) is a callow, boastful youth who desperately wants to make his mark. The first half of the film is a deliberately Pinteresque two-hander in which this odd couple sit in the dark and await the return of their intended victim, Mr Kist. Cully wants to hear Pinner's "most fucked-up" story from his life of crime; Pinner obliges with a lengthy monologue of a kind usually found in the theatre (or a Bergman movie); while this isn't *Persona*, what feels like a time-filling ghost story does at least have a later narrative pay-off.

Despite the sense of unease created by Pinner's interrupted story, it's only when the gangsters find evidence of occult activity in the garage that it becomes obvious this isn't going to be one of Pinner's smoother hits. Cully's suspicion that their target is "a bender" (Kist is out at the opera) is confirmed amusingly when he sees the word "homunculus" scrawled in a blood-stained grimoire; at this point, things start taking a turn for the Dennis Wheatleys, and the eventual entrance of the mysterious Mr Kist, whose evil suavité is delivered with old-school relish by Jonathan Hansler) confirms what we have all – apart from the hapless hitmen – already guessed.

If Hogan's film mostly succeeds, that's due to a simple premise delivered with style and strong central performances which overcome the sometimes stagey dialogue; it's genuinely likeable, but it never quite delivers on its promise.

David Sutton

Fortean Times Verdict
CHARACTER-DRIVEN HORROR DOESN'T QUITE CATCH FIRE **6**

WorldMags.net

The Victim

Dir Monthon Arayangkoon, Thailand 2006
MVM, £12.99

The Victim arrives highly recommended and with an advance blurb that tells us we're in for a treat and "a twist that would turn M Night Shyamalan green with envy." Well, this is far better than anything that Mr Tales-of-the-bleedin'-obvious could ever deliver. In fact, with the distinctly average monster-under-the-subway movie *Garuda* (2004) under his belt and *The Victim* actually predating the recently well-received and favourably reviewed *The House* (2007), a better comparison for the arc that Arayangkoon's career is following would be that of Del Toro. But there the comparisons must stop. While European cinema really only has the Roman Catholic tradition left for exploring the magical, Thai culture's potential for horror is almost unlimited. As a Buddhist country, it's so shot through with stories of ghosts, possessions and hauntings that there's no need to suspend disbelief. Spirits surround and sometimes inhabit us; this is quite simply a given.

Ting (Pitchanart Sakakorn) is an aspiring actress who helps the police with rather extreme re-enactments of crimes; this is seemingly quite common practice in Thailand, where criminals are forced to confess by being made to relive their misdemeanours. Taking method acting to new levels, Ting gradually becomes first haunted and then possessed by the spirit of a murdered former Miss Thailand. And then the film breaks down, both visually and narratively, making a leap so audacious that you will just have to watch it (while adding *The Matrix* to the list of reference points already cited). I guarantee you'll be scratching your head.
Tim Weinberg

Fortean Times Verdict
ARAYANGKOON IS A HORROR MASTER IN THE MAKING **8**

The Lost Coast Tapes

Dir Corey Grant, US 2012
G2 Pictures, £15.99

Guerrilla documentary film makers must be falling over each other in the undergrowth in pursuit of the truth of this or that local woodland legend by now. In *The Lost Coast Tapes*, an investigative journalist with one or two production debacles behind him takes his reluctant team to cover the claims of a Bigfoot hunter: the possession, no less, of the body of that most ubiquitous but elusive of cryptids, a Sasquatch. Except that crass, driven journalist Sean Reynolds believes it is nothing but a money-making hoax by eloquent woodland dweller Carl Dryback, and sets out to expose him. Unluckily for them all, something is lurking in the woods. One or two moments of imaginatively glimpsed monster-maybes aside, there is simply not enough tension or terror to justify this wobbly hand-held ride. It suffers terribly from inevitable comparison with *Blair Witch* and *Troll Hunter*, and in reminding you of their success only underlines what *The Lost Tapes* gets so interminably wrong. An effective twist at the end hints at the more interesting film it could have been.
Nick Čirkovič

Fortean Times Verdict
CRYPTOZOOLOGICAL WOBBLE-FEST FAILS TO IMPRESS **3**

A Night in the Woods

Dir Richard Parry, UK 2011
Vertigo Films, £15.99

My main problem with *A Night in the Woods* is that the three protagonists are total shits. In one way or another, they all deceive each other, and the local legend of Wistman's Woods on Dartmoor, where Brody takes his girlfriend and her incestuously hands-on cousin Leo, says that sinners will have horrible retribution visited upon them. Good. If you cared about the horrible things happening to characters, then the imaginative lighting and camerawork might actually mean something. But there is no investment here. In the 'Making Of', director Richard Parry talks affectingly about a powerfully scary experience that inspired him to write and direct this wooden outing. Sadly, his genuinely chilling recollection gets lost in the woods of *Peeping Tom* pretentions.
Nick Čirkovič

Fortean Times Verdict
MORE BLAND WATCHERY THAN BLAIR WITCHERY **3**

SHORTS

ELFIE HOPKINS

(Kaleidoscope, £17.99/19.99)

Elfie Hopkins is a horror-comedy (perhaps *League of Gentlemen*, *Buffy* and *Hot Fuzz* would be useful markers) and benefits from the involvement of the Winstone clan. Daddy Ray steals the show in a couple of cameos as a sinister butcher, while daughter Jaime is our titular heroine, whose slacker, dope-smoking persona is endearing and infuriating in equal measure. Elfie's obsession with old detective movies means she sees conspiracies everywhere; then, one day, she gets it right when mysterious city-dwellers arrive and villagers start vanishing. If we extend our frame of reference to include *Scooby Doo* and even *Deliverance*, you'll get an idea of this tasty stew's eclectic sources. The package also includes the short *Little Munchkin*, writer/director Ryan Andrew's original pitch. **TW** 7/10

AIRBORNE

(Chelsea Films, £12.99)

Airborne is surprisingly good. Despite its obviously modest means, there's some effective writing, with backstories and characterisation that link it to the golden age of disaster movies, while its cast of soldiers, lovers and gangsters all being bumped-off makes it seem like *Poirot at 20,000 Feet*. Worth the ticket price must be the presence of Mark (Luke Skywalker) Hamill, who's had almost zero screen visibility since those halcyon *Star Wars* days. Of course, comics fans know he's never been out of work as perhaps the most in-demand voice-over artist in animation. For Marvel he's been The Gargoyle, Hobgoblin and Red Skull, while since 1993 he's been The Joker in most animated Batmans. Interestingly, he almost always plays villains, as if Luke's purity has faded (like his boyish looks) with the passage of time. He's actually pretty good, although he betrays the voice-over work with a curiously 'disembodied' tone and a certain lack of interacton with his co-stars. Groany old gangster gits Billy Murray and Alan Ford aren't too hammy, loads of people die and we all go home happy; result. **TW** 7/10

[•REC]^3: GENESIS

(Entertainment One, £19.99/£12.99)

After *[•Rec]^2's* video game structures and First Person Shooter visual stylings and its splicing of *Night of the Living Dead* with T*he Exorcist*, the third movie in the *[•Rec]* franchise simply jettisons the original characters, story and setting while retaining the found footage concept. Does this suggest that the series has now jumped the shark? Or has it confounded fans' expectations by transforming itself into an ongoing meditation on the notion of obsessive video recording? Well, this time, we're at a big fat Catalan wedding (plenty of video cameras about), where the mysterious disease of the first two films breaks out once more, turning happy wedding guests into bloodthirsty ghouls and a previously scary horror series into a knowing romp that owes more to the likes of *Evil Dead II* than the two previous *[•Rec]* films. If you've no problem with that, there's quite a bit to enjoy here – particularly the sight of the stunning Leticia Dolera wielding a chainsaw with admirable enthusiasm and bloody results. It's all stylishly delivered, if ultimately somewhat pointless. **DS** 5/10

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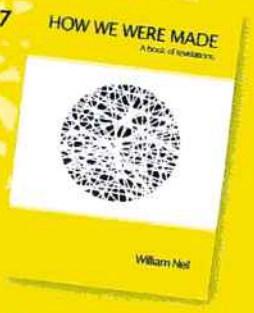
Nexus Magazine review, Aug/Sept 2007



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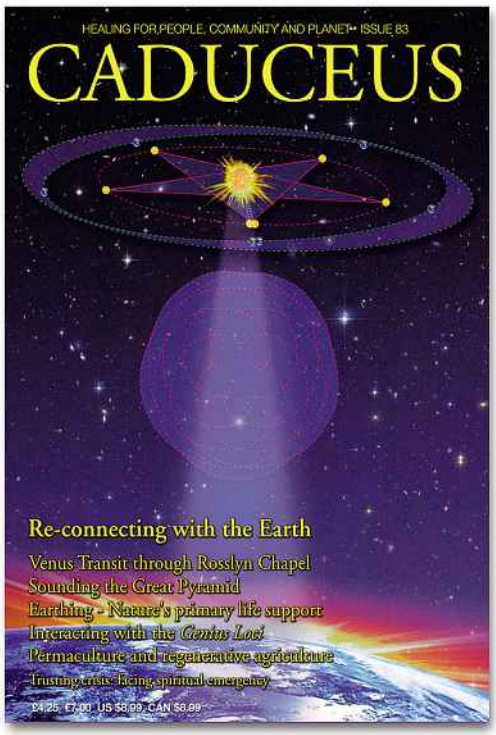
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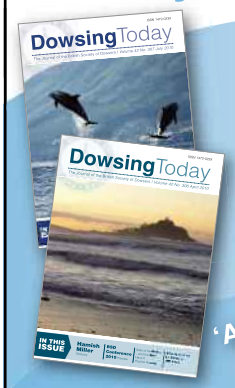

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Dear FT...

letters

Head first

Mat Coward mentions the practice of burying people vertically and upside-down [MythConception, **FT291:17**]. According to Jonathan Swift in *Gulliver's Travels*, chapter 6, this is the usual custom in Lilliput:

"They bury their Dead with their Heads directly downwards, because they hold an Opinion that in eleven thousand Moons they are all to rise again, in which Period the Earth (which they conceive to be flat) will turn upside down, and by this means they shall, at their Resurrection, be found ready standing on their Feet. The Learned among them confess the Absurdity of this Doctrine, but the Practice still continues, in compliance to the Vulgar."

Ulrich Magin
Leinfelden-Echterdingen, Germany

Belgian hare

The giant hare that Andrew Munro spotted in Co. Cork [**FT291:71**] could have some connection to a colony of Belgian hare introduced into the Irish Republic sometime in the 1940s as a possible food source. As the creatures became rampant, breeding alarmingly and threatening the ecosystem, they were wiped out. My father told me this story in the 1970s when we were fishing Lough Ree on the Shannon. He said the last of the Belgian hare had been corralled on an island in the middle of the lake. This was after I spotted what looked like a huge rabbit through binoculars from the vantage point of our rowing boat. The same breed of huge bunnies was used in the series *Tellytubbies* to make the irritating adult-sized TV-stomached fools look more infant-sized.

Morgan C Jones
Dublin

Editor's note: For a report on the Continental Giant Rabbit, see **FT209:8**.

Devil bridges

I have been watching the new series of *Ancient X-Files* on Discovery Channel. The first episode concerned a hidden code within Leonardo's 'Mona Lisa'. One researcher believes they have found the location of the bridge in the background of the painting somewhere in Italy. According to legend, this bridge was built by the Devil in return for the first soul that crossed over it. The Devil was cheated as the locals sent a dog over as the first living thing to cross.

This brings us to Wales and Devil's Bridge just outside Aberystwyth. There are three bridges, each one built on top of the one below. The bottom one is connected with a Devil legend: an old local woman farmer was cut off from her cattle on the other side of the river; the Devil appeared to her and offered to build her a bridge in return for the first soul to cross over it, but once it was built she threw some food to the other side and sent a dog over, thus cheating the Devil.

The two stories are virtually identical; are there any similar folktales?

Simon Gilbert
Feidr Fawr, Pembrokeshire

Editor's note: "The dog on the bridge" is an international folktale told of several old, picturesque, high-arched bridges whose building history was unknown, among them the Devil's Bridge in Pontarfynach (former Cardiganshire), the 15th-century Kirkby Lonsdale Bridge across the River Lune in Westmorland (now popularly known as the Devil's Bridge), and the bridge over the River Reuss in Switzerland. The story was popularised by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow who, following his tour of Europe in 1826, included the Swiss tradition in his *Golden Legend*. [Westwood & Simpson: *The Lore of the Land*, p770]

The concept of God

"Wired for God?" [**FT286:42–47, 287:38–43**] was excellent and thought-provoking. However, I think Charles Foster misses a few aspects of the God concept. Using the examples of how children attribute certain levels of knowledge to be only accessible to God, he misses (or discounts) the narcissism factor. In every example he gave, the children expressed their own knowledge as God's special knowledge. Narcissism cannot be discounted in explaining the universal presence of God in all societies. With the total lack of objective evidence for a material God, the concept is entirely generated from a narcissistic viewpoint within our brains. I agree with the author that this is probably understandable from an evolutionary point of view. It's also clear that humans tend to find that God's ultimate plans coincide with their own material needs. And if life is *not* positive, that is also the result of a personal interaction with God.

I am confused by the assertion that altruism is unsupported by evolutionary theory. Altruism has been documented in many non-human animals and it seems to have a specific place in group dynamics. For instance, wild elephants have been observed performing funeral rituals after the death of one of their number, so clearly such behaviour is not confined to humans.

William Hohauser
New York

The estimable Alan Murdie [**FT290:70**] took Charles Foster to task for aspects of his article 'Wired For God?' [**FT287:38–43**]. Mr Murdie quite rightly pinged Mr Foster for repeatedly advancing unfalsifiable theories with no real evidence. Then in the endgame he choked, uttering an appeal to authority (really, Mr Murdie? Such a classic rhetorical mistake from a barrister?) with a quote from cryptozoology debunker Ronald Binns – "Landscape is not sinister to a salmon or an otter".

How do Mr Murdie or Mr Binns know this? The evidence seems to be that fish possess amygdalas (the seat of dread in humans and likely in other animals as well)

Continued on p71...

Simulacra Corner

Ben Capp (not the Australian photographer) was eating some fresh mussels in Normandy when he came upon this specimen shaped like a human fœtus. He said: "I thought there was definitely something fishy about it so was unable to eat it."

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Hunting vampires

I suspect that the history of the vampire-hunter's kit [**FT288:32–39**, **291:5**] in its current, much-publicised form of shiny box, neat compartments and antique accoutrements is a very brief one, with everything now appearing on the market being of recent assemblage, even though some individual components may be of vintage manufacture. I can't find any mention of a "kit" as such in the literature. It is worth noting, however, that the effective vampire-hunter really does have to arrive prepared, so some sort of container and a list of useful contents is definitely required.

Going back to what remains the most influential piece of vampire fiction ever produced, in chapter 15 of *Dracula* (1897), Bram Stoker has vampire-hunter Abraham Van Helsing making his first visit, along with Seward, Holmwood and Morris, to the tomb of the undead Lucy. He is carrying a bag, from which he takes a matchbox, a piece of candle, a turnscrew (screwdriver) and a tiny fretsaw. Returning the next night, he produces a dark lantern and his screwdriver, before taking from his bag a mass of sacramental wafers in a white napkin and "some whitish stuff like dough or putty" which he works together to make an anti-vampire paste with which to seal the door of the tomb. When Lucy returns, he holds out a little golden crucifix, which has presumably also come from the bag.

When the team goes back the following night for their final showdown with vampire Lucy, something altogether more substantial is required. Dr Seward records in his diary that: "Van Helsing, instead of his little black bag, had with him a long leather one, something like a cricketing bag; it was manifestly of fair weight." This is not surprising, as he proceeds to take from it the dark lantern, two wax candles, a soldering iron, some plumbing solder, a small oil-lamp, his operating knives and a round wooden stake "some two and a half or three inches thick and about three feet long… With this stake came a heavy hammer, such as in households is used in the coal-cellar for breaking the lumps." He also has with him a missal, from which he reads the prayer for the dead as Arthur hammers the stake into the breast of his erstwhile fiancée. As Van Helsing and Seward then saw off the end of the stake, cut off Lucy's head, fill her mouth with garlic and, after soldering up the damaged coffin, screw its lid back on, he must also have been carrying screwdriver, saw, garlic and some autopsy equipment that he had previously asked Seward to provide. So it was a heavy bag, but somehow far less romantic in its contents than the elegant polished boxes of pistols and glass phials.

And of course, life follows art – some few years ago (I failed to note the date, I'm afraid) Sean Manchester (before his elevation to the priesthood) appeared on a TV show where he was interviewed by Jonathan Ross on a train. Discussing his career as a vampire-hunter, while drinking from a sadly mundane British Rail plastic mug, Manchester pulled from somewhere beneath the table a crucifix, a large string of garlic and an ornate bottle of holy water (Ross commenting that it might have come from Oddbins and needed a nice Chianti and a candle stuck in it). When stakes were mentioned, he produced two "discreet" ones of fairly short length, before extracting, with some difficulty, a rough-hewn "whopper" ("what we call the Van Helsing") similar in size to the stake he had used on the Highgate vampire. Ross asked him how he carried this about and was let into the "secret" that Manchester toted a cricket-bag. Alas, just as Manchester was revealing photographic evidence of the physical disintegration of a real vampire, comedian Vic Reeves appeared as a British Rail attendant flourishing a cheese sandwich, the train pulled into Milton Keynes and we never saw the cricket-bag itself.

Sean Manchester's 1985 book *The Highgate Vampire* contains a photograph of its author being handed one of his discreet wooden stakes from what looks like a small modern suitcase, against the open lid of which are propped another stake, a small mallet and four simple crosses – the concept of the portable kit is clearly there, but it looks far more *ad hoc* than the posh "vintage" ones. Manchester's text also makes it clear that you can't carry everything – when investigating a vampire-haunted mansion, he and his team have to rush into a nearby Jewish old people's home (brandishing crucifixes) to request salt and buckets of water. He also reminds us of the practicalities that the neat little kits fail to take into consideration – stakeouts can take time, so you'll also need to carry thermos flasks and sandwiches (though the latter may well develop an unnatural covering of mould, so look before you bite.)

If one did happen to go searching for vampires (seriously, kids – don't try this at home!), Van Helsing's commodious bag containing a workman's kit of practical tools sounds more to the point than the dressing-table type of custom-built container currently turning up for sale – and its contents do indicate that breaking and entering might be as much a part of the job as sprinkling apotropaic herbs.

I suspect the imagery of the kits is developed from medical associations, again going back to *Dracula*, where two of the characters are doctors and vampirism is "diagnosed" much as a disease would be. Indeed, Van Helsing's smaller black bag is presumably a doctor's bag, and carrying it would indicate that he is a professional man properly equipped. In Leslie S Klinger's notes to *The New Annotated Dracula* (2008), he illustrates Van Helsing's comment to Dr Seward that they will need a set of post-mortem knives with a photo of a vintage wooden case containing carefully compartmentalised post-mortem instruments. This looks as much like the concept and design of the recent kits as anything I've seen, and although most of its contents are different, if you're going to invade a dead body then there is also some overlap of function, as the text of *Dracula* makes clear. Its appearance in the Klinger volume comes too late to be a direct source, but I suspect that similar real Victorian objects of specialised medical use provided the inspiration for the appearance of the recent kits, while the concept of the pre-selected equipment being toted around by the well-prepared specialist (even though its container may be less formal) is already there in *Dracula* and in the self-attested practice of Sean Manchester.

The eBay sale of vampire-hunting kits had, by the way, already made its appearance in fiction before the excellent article in **FT288**. Twice a year, three local Newcastle authors (in this case myself, David Almond and Sean O'Brien) write new ghost stories to be read at the Literary and Philosophical Society Library's "Phantoms at the Phil" event. On 6 January this year, my own story, "Expanding the Business", had two elderly ladies concocting just such kits before moving on to sell a ghost.

Gail-Nina Anderson
Jesmond, Tyne & Wear

PS. The post-mortem kit in the Klinger volume is too grainy to publish, but the link below should show you a similar object from a public collection: http://bit.ly/P5hUOf (sciencemuseum.org.uk).

Jonathan Ferguson believes the vampire slaying-kit he acquired for the Royal Armouries Museum is the only one in a UK museum [**FT291:5**]. However, there is an impressive example on display at Ripley's Believe It Or Not! attraction in Piccadilly, London.

Clive Watson
Rainham, Essex

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… continued from p69

and display behaviour characteristic of fear when threatened. How, then, do we know that fish cannot and do not feel a nameless dread in certain places, caused by features of place itself?

As to the argument that any sinister qualities of landscape are created and transmitted culturally (hard, if not impossible, to falsify) – while it may be difficult to argue that salmon have culture, it may not be so hard when it comes to otters. Otters are intelligent and certainly communicate: it is a well-documented fact that otter pups are born not knowing how to swim and need to be taught. I'm racking my brain trying to figure out where I saw the article on the transmission of tool use between populations of sea otters, but if I'm right about it, that would tend to indicate the existence of some sort of basic culture amongst these clever beasties.

Kay Orchison
By email

'Child' explained

I don't know about Tam Jones's humming sofa [**FT291:71**], but I can explain the word 'child' displayed on the microwave. Several manufacturers, including Panasonic, include child lock systems on their microwave ovens to prevent accidental or dangerous use by young children. It's probable your correspondent stumbled on the correct sequence of buttons to activate this feature by mistake, whereupon the display showed 'child' to indicate the lock was on.

Jonathan Ratty
By email

Sky critters

It is a basic principle of good research that the researcher should set out the potential objections to his/her theory. This is why *The Origin of Species* was so convincing. Darwin addressed the difficulties and recognised the objections. Unfortunately, Scott Deschaine [**FT291:30–35**] seems too keen on his theory to have considered the objections. I hope that I can set out at least two objections which need to be considered.

Firstly, Deschaine acknowledges that invertebrates can grow to large sizes in the ocean. However, he doesn't seem to realise that this is precisely because water reduces the effects of gravity. Terrestrial invertebrates are notoriously small because of the restrictions which gravity places on them. A hypothetical large aerial invertebrate would need to overcome the effects of gravity.

Given that the "jellyfish" model put forward by Deschaine doesn't allow for flapping or gliding flight, his UFOs would need to be lighter than air. There are, I suggest, only three ways of achieving this: (1) The UFO would need to have cells holding a lighter-than-air gas (hydrogen or helium, neither of which occurs naturally on this planet except in combination). (2) The UFO would need to have vacuum cells (again, vacuums do not occur naturally on this planet and no known organic mechanism could create one). (3) The UFO would need to heat its internal air to make it lighter than the surrounding air (which would require a remarkable energy input). In other words, there is no conceivable mechanism by which a hypothetical aerial creature could maintain its lighter-than-air status.

Secondly, Deschaine does not address the issue of the ecosystem within which his creatures would exist. He suggests that they are largely carnivorous. This is inherently probable for aerial creatures; birds are more likely to be carnivorous than terrestrial or marine creatures. However, the food chain always begins with plants and includes herbivores. Birds are ultimately dependent on the plant-eaters, and this is why we are so aware of them. Since there are obviously no plants or herbivores in the middle to upper atmosphere, any aerial carnivore would inevitably be involved in the terrestrial or marine food chain. This means that we would have been aware of it long ago.

Having said all this, I do not wholly reject Deschaine's theory; I reject it only in so far as it assumes a terrestrial origin for UFO creatures, since the theory does not make sense in evolutionary terms. However, I can conceive of interplanetary UFO jellyfish occasionally visiting our atmosphere: creatures originating in the vacuum of space and developing as – I know not what. After all, our assumptions about life are based on a sample of one planet. But assuming an interplanetary equivalent of the plant/herbivore food chain makes some kind of sense (who really knows what happens in the alleged vacuum of space?); and interplanetary creatures could easily incorporate vacuum cells to enable them to operate in planetary atmospheres.

I offer this theory to *FT* readers in the expectation that they will point out the objections to it that I have failed to see.

Martin Jenkins
London

As mentioned in your **FT291** editorial, there is a startling similarity between the creatures Scott Deschaine posits in his article "The Sky is Alive" and those described by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in his 1913 story "The Horror of the Heights". In the story, an adventurous airman attempts to reach the very edges of atmosphere, an endeavour that doesn't go well for him and ends up with his notes scattered over Kent. The outer atmosphere, it appears, is an 'air-jungle' alive with species not seen on Earth, but closely resembling marine animals. He writes: "Conceive a jelly-fish such as sails in our summer seas, bell-shaped and of enormous size – far larger, I should judge, than the dome of St Paul's… It pulsated with a delicate and regular rhythm. From it there depended two long, drooping green tentacles, which swayed slowly backwards and forwards." Other creatures that pass him are more like serpents, and one species has gas-filled bladders to keep it aloft.

Jacoby Hayward
Stoke on Trent, Staffordshire

Scott Deschaine's fascinating article on UFOs as living creatures reminded me of the HP Lovecraft story "From Beyond". The protagonist in the tale, through stimulation of the pineal gland, has revealed to him a previously undetected world of kaleidoscopic lights and strange, airborne creatures: "Foremost among the living objects were great inky jellyfish monstrosities which flabbily quivered in harmony with the vibrations from the machine. They were present in loathsome profusion, and I saw to my horror that they overlapped; that they were semi-fluid and capable of passing through one another and what we know as solids. These things were never still, but seemed ever floating about with some malignant purpose. Sometimes they appeared to devour one another, the attacker launching itself at its victim and instantaneously obliterating the latter from sight."

The tale hints that once these creatures from beyond the walls of perception are glimpsed by some highly sensitive individual, they become aware of (and hostile to) that which perceives them. As always, Lovecraft masterfully seizes the true essence of horror, suggesting a world where man is ever poised on the brink of peril and insanity as he wades through the unseen dangers which teem indifferently in the air and the sky: "It would help my shaky nerves if I could dismiss what I now have to think of the air and the sky about and above me. I never feel alone or comfortable, and a hideous sense of pursuit comes chillingly on me when I am weary."

With regard to both Lovecraft's other-dimensional entities and the jellyfish of the sky hypothesised in Deschaine's article, isn't it both fascinating and terrifying to think of such an alien world so close at hand?

Adam Hart
Levenshulme, Manchester

"That's no good. It's non-iron."

PETER A KING

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Flying ice-cream

Some time ago, I went with my parents to the coastal town of Seahouses in Northumberland, where I bought a Cornetto ice-cream. As soon as I unwrapped it, I felt a 'plop' on top of my head, and thought "Uh-oh! A seagull's pooped on me". I told my dad, who cleaned my head with a tissue. However, we found it was not white bird poop but a glob of chocolate ice-cream! At the time, I had my ice-cream and wrapper in my hands at my waist, and the only way the ice-cream could have ended up in my hair was if my hands had been above my head. Have other readers had a similar experience?

Gary Watson
Cramlington, Northumberland

Suffolk mystery

I have had a lifelong interest in forteana and know many people who have seen ghosts – so I believe in ghosts despite never having seen one myself. That is apart from one strange brief encounter that could be seen in a ghostly context.

In 2003, I was travelling by train between Cambridge and Stowmarket, which is the nearest railway station to the village in Suffolk where I live. This journey was during early evening and it must have been winter because it was dark. Half way between Newmarket and Bury St Edmunds, the train stopped due to a signalling problem. I was stuck in the middle of nowhere and it was before the days of good mobile phone signals. The problem was, my father was due to pick me up, but I had no way to warn him I might be some time. After over an hour of waiting, the train resumed its journey. I was extremely anxious, as I couldn't warn my father to let him know I was late. I phoned home when I had reception, but he had left and I couldn't call him as he had no phone. I eventually arrived at Stowmarket and ran over the footbridge to the other side where my father might or might not still be waiting. At the top of the bridge I met a man wearing an Ipswich Town football shirt, scarf and cap. As I passed him, he turned to me and said "Nick, your Dad's waiting for you," and I replied "Thanks" as I ran past.

I assumed my father had been talking to other people waiting at the station and had been talking about me. I found him sitting in the car in the car park and when I asked if he had been talking to anyone he told me he had not left the car. When I told him about the Ipswich Town fan on the bridge, he told me that he must have recognised him sitting in the car park. My father used to be a teacher in Stowmarket before I was born and on occasions when visiting Stowmarket a few people have asked him his name to tell him, "Oh, you used to teach me". This might explain my odd experience, but what I can't understand is even if someone on their way to catch a train had recognised my father – 20-odd years after he stopped teaching – sitting in a dark car at night, how did he know I was his son, how did he know I was worried he wouldn't be there, and how did he know my name?

Nick Fowler
Suffolk

ETIENNE GILFILLAN

Spooky hospitals

I work in a 'special needs' hospital where weird things happen regularly. We often say that the hospital is haunted, and no one really likes to do night shifts there. There are monitors in the children's rooms so that we can hear if they cry. On many occasions, we have heard sighs and cries coming from empty rooms, and one of the older children regularly talks to a woman who isn't there.

Recently, I was doing a morning shift when another nurse and I heard screams and bumps coming from a room we thought was empty. Worried about the girl who usually occupies that room (and who we believed had been taken out for a walk), we opened the door and discovered that there was nobody there. We had to report the incident to the chief nurse. She told us that she had the feeling that something was going to happen, as the previous night the atmosphere had been very agitated. Apparently, a portrait had fallen off the wall of the same room – the broken glass had almost hit the girl who slept in the bed. The portrait was of a boy who used to sleep in the room, who had died exactly a year before the incident.

Although I was scared, I had to continue doing my shift. While changing the nappies of two children, I heard the door of the bathroom shutting behind me, and the click of the lock. I tried to open it but it seemed that somebody had locked it from outside. I still can't explain who might have done it, as neither my colleagues nor any of the children would have played a practical joke of that sort. My colleagues finally arrived and opened the door for us. By that time, all I wanted was to finish my shift and go home.

Lucy L
Ireland

When I was working in a Staffordshire hospital, I was told several ghost stories by the actual witnesses. One ward had a central nurses' station where staff could sit for the all-important brew while safely observing all comings and goings. In the corner of this ward was a bed space whose bed had been removed so that excess equipment could be stored there. Wheelchairs, walking frames, dismantled beds and odd furniture had been ingeniously stacked up to totally fill the space and the curtain had then been drawn around it: there was absolutely no room for anyone to move inside the curtain.

Well, in the dead of night, a nurse saw the curtain lift and bulge outward, exactly as if moved by a nurse's behind as she bent over the bed! The nurse rubbed her eyes, looked again and nudged her mate with a "Do you see what I see?" Her mate certainly did and both girls watched the behind move busily around the bed – which wasn't there, remember!

They watched, spellbound, for a couple of minutes as the movement continued on around the bed to the other side. Eventually they tiptoed over and pulled the curtain back – nothing but a pile of scrap, and nowhere for anyone to hide or get past them...

Carla R
By email

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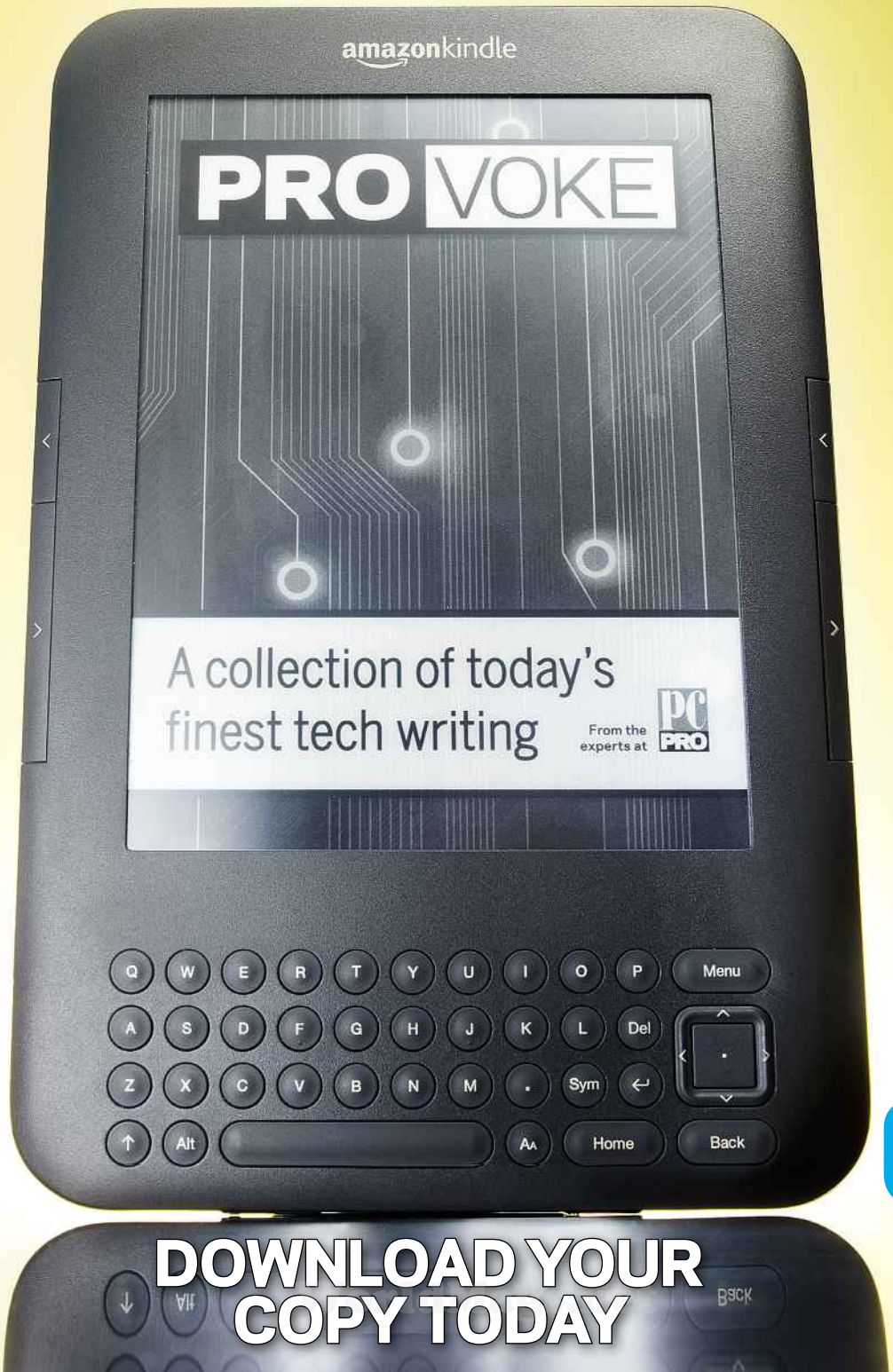

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THE ILLUSTRATED POLICE NEWS
LAW COURTS AND WEEKLY RECORD

ABOVE: "Extraordinary scene in the house of a hermit", from the *IPN* of 22 May 1869. The story cannot be verified in the local newspapers, and must be viewed with suspicion.

15. A WELSH HERMIT AND HIS MENAGERIE

For many years, an old hermit named Evan Gwynn resided in the obscure village of Brocklyn, North Wales. He was a morose and moody old man, very dirty in his habits, and disposed to shun the company of his fellow humans as far as possible. He only emerged from his humble farmhouse, or rather hermitage, once a week to do his shopping. In 1869, after old Gwynn had not been seen for 10 days, local people believed he must have died. After the police had been informed, two constables made their way to the hermitage. When they knocked on the door, there was no reply.

At length, the constables broke down the front door, made their way along an unlit hallway, and entered the front parlour. They were amazed to find the hermit sitting in a large armchair, surrounded by numerous cats, dogs and monkeys. One of the latter animals sat chattering on the back of the hermit's chair, gesticulating at the intruders. The cats flew at the policemen, who used their truncheons to ward off the half-starved felines.

Gwynn was most cantankerous, demanding to be left alone with his animals. He had been dangerously ill, he said, but was now recovering. All he cared for was the companionship of his animals, since he was weary of the world, and at war with all humankind. The kindly policemen were reluctant to leave the feeble old man in such a miserable situation, however; they persuaded him to accept help from a doctor, as well as some nourishment for his emaciated frame.

Among the locals, there was much speculation about Gwynn's strange behaviour; it was rumoured that he had been cheated out of a title and estates when still quite young, but this could not be confirmed.

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LETTER FROM CAMBODIA

3. Monks, merit and millenarianism

FT's errant web mistress **JEN OGILVIE** files another report from Cambodia.

One of the first things you notice after arriving in Cambodia is the ubiquity of Buddhism.

There are monks around every corner: young men with shaved heads and saffron robes out on alms rounds, or heading to lessons, or making a phone call from the back of a moto (motorcycle or moped). Poking out of every skyline are the chaotically layered, gold-trimmed roofs of *wats* (monasteries), and days can be measured by the chants floating over their walls. With the exception of a few distinct minorities – the Chams, the hill tribes, a scattering of Christians – everyone is a believer.

The purpose of much of this very visible Buddhism is merit-making, a practical system for achieving worldly success and avoiding reincarnation as some lowly, creeping bug. It is to win merit that everyone hands out food or money to the monks on their morning rounds, and receives in return a blessing in a language that they rarely understand.[1] And it's for merit that they make offerings at the *wats* on 'Buddha days', and give crumpled hundred-riel notes to beggars.

This is not *karma* in our vague, Western, mandalas-and-sitars sense. Here, there is mechanistic cause and effect. If you do good, you will be rewarded with money and health in this life or the next. If you do bad, you will be punished. Your merit balance rises and falls according to your actions. Chance doesn't exist. This system has been blamed for a perceived Cambodian inertia; or at least a certain conservatism toward existing hierarchies, as people believe that their superiors, however abusive, must owe their position to merit acquired in a previous life. Courtney Work, an anthropologist who has spent a year in a village in Kompong Chhnang province, argues that in modern Cambodia this merit-making activity can harden patron-client relationships: in her village, locals and monks felt unable to object to oppression by urban elites who had donated money for their new temples.[2]

Temple-building might be the most powerful way of acquiring merit, but it's far from the only one. A more affordable option would be to try to behave well. Alternatively, you could, for instance, pay for a bird to be released from a cage; the fact that it's trained to return is irrelevant. King Ang Duang (r. 1848–60) ordered that at the moment of death his flesh should be cut from his body and fed to hungry animals and birds of prey.

Much merit-making involves monks. They don't just receive offerings, but by their very ordination they generate merit – for themselves and, importantly, for their families. This is possible because merit can be transferred. A similar process occurs at Pchum Ben, when families give food to the monks in return for merit for their dead ancestors.

BELOW: Buddhist monks walk at Angkor Wat temple in Siem Reap province, some 300km (185 miles) northwest of Phnom Penh.

GETTY IMAGES / AFP / TANG CHHIN SOTHY

Most Cambodian men will take robes at some point during their lives – often for a very short period, and in some cases just a day. Entering and leaving the monkhood is easy. My Khmer teacher, Sokleng, was a monk for 10 years. He says he wanted to learn about the teachings of the Buddha, and as he was poor it was also the best way to get an education. Other boys become monks to earn merit for their parents, or to help a recently deceased relative towards a good rebirth. Some are fleeing drink or drug problems. Most ordinations take place during rainy season, when the monks closet themselves in their monasteries – a practice that is supposed to help the rice grow.

Not every boy, then, who becomes a monk, has a vocation for a life of quiet contemplation. In fact, putting hundreds of men together doesn't necessarily guarantee perfect morality. Watch a group of young monks and they're like any boys of that age – they laugh at each other, mess around, ring their girlfriends. Discipline varies from *wat* to *wat*. In Courtney Work's village, the monks spend their time watching TV and on the phone – the villagers don't seem to mind, she says, so long as the monks occupy the temple space and perform the proper ceremonies. There is some bad behaviour. Monks caught *in flagrante delicto* are a staple of news reports. Last month, the *Koh Santepheap Daily* reported that a 31-year-old monk in Kampong Cham province was having sex with a woman when her husband arrived home unexpectedly and caught him hiding naked in the attic.[3] A week later, the *Phnom Penh Post* ran a story about a 73-year-old chief abbot on the run in Battambang province, who had argued with his son-in-law about a cow and beaten him to death with a wooden stick.[4]

Nevertheless, monks are treated with great respect (there's even a separate set of words that should be used when talking to or about monks), giving rise to the phenomenon of the fake monk. These fake monks were warned against by the fables. "Tah Tyen and Chow Saun", from the fable collection *Gatiloke*,[5] recounts the tale of a group of friends who pretend to be monks with prophetic powers. They walk into a village and announce that it is about to suffer a terrible disaster, which can only be avoided by building a cottage for the evil ghosts and stocking it full of alcohol and boiled chicken – the monk impersonators, of course, then drink the alcohol and eat the chicken. The French colonial government thought seditionists were pretending to be monks and hiding in *wats* after fomenting revolt. Last year, a man was arrested in Phnom

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GETTY IMAGES / AFP / PHILIPPE LOPEZ

ABOVE: Two Cambodian Buddhist monks stand outside an Internet cafe in Phnom Penh.

Penh for dressing up as a monk and going on alms rounds to collect money for beer.[6]

Monks don't just misbehave and make merit. Traditionally, they had formidable magical knowledge: they could read futures in the stars, heal the sick, craft apotropaic amulets and tattoos, and recite powerful mantras. The rest of their time, according to a report drawn up by Thailand when it acquired the three northwest provinces in 1867, was taken up with martial arts, kite-flying, chariot and boat-building, and firework manufacture.[7] Monks' duties today include exorcising evil spirits from homes and factories.[8] And despite the efforts of modernists, magical elements persist.

Monks have also led many of Cambodia's popular rebellions. Millenarian movements have been common throughout Cambodian history, particularly during times of social change or war. Buddhism predicts an age of degeneracy, when the Dharma is forgotten and the world plunges into horror – the blood flowing as high as "the belly of an elephant" according to one Cambodian prophetic text. After that, comes the era of the Maitreya, or future Buddha. One symptom of this age of degeneracy is unjust rulers, and it was against these that the people rebelled, on behalf of a purer Buddhism and the Khmer spirit.

The monks who led the uprisings were made strong, even invincible, by their store of merit. They also used magical amulets, mantras and herbs to empower themselves and their followers. In 1916, a group of monks trained in martial arts and fortified with herbal medicines intended to confer invincibility joined Prince Yukanthor in his fight against the French; in 1925, an ex-monk in Stung Treng started a rebellion with the help of "a golden frog with a human voice".[9] According to a poem written around 1869, the monk Kai and his followers,

> ***A separate set of words should be used when referring to monks***

who fought the Vietnamese in 1820–21, were invincible until they started killing their enemies, when they lost their merit and supernatural powers and were slaughtered.

The *wats* were at the centre of intellectual life in Cambodia until well into the 20th century. Even the arrival of print in the 1920s simply meant that more Buddhist texts were published, rather than novels, political pamphlets and journals as happened in Vietnam and Indonesia. It was the ideas and activities of modernisers, campaigning for a purer, more authentically Khmer Buddhism, that shaped early Cambodian nationalism and anti-colonialism. The Khmer Rouge took up this nationalistic rhetoric, as well as the monks' quest for purification. In fact, although the Khmer Rouge wiped out established Buddhism – monks were called parasites because they depended on alms, or, in Party-speak, "breathed through other people's noses" – their ideology was heavily (and probably unwittingly) influenced by the monks' ideals: asceticism, discipline, renunciation of self.

Buddhism was suppressed during Democratic Kampuchea and the Vietnamese-led Communist regime that followed, but today the *wats* are thriving once more. The monks don't always agree. Some advocate a rationalistic, socially engaged Buddhism, helping local communities, funding orphanages – even, in the case of a few activist monks, fighting land-grabs and defending human rights.

At the other extreme are monks following a "hidden" or "interior" path. These monks, with their special rituals and non-orthodox meditative techniques, are part of a tradition of esotericism within Cambodian Theravada Buddhism that stretches back centuries. Leaders are believed to have magical powers, including prophecy. Large merit-making, misdeed-expunging donations are encouraged, and the movement is patronised by Hun Sen and other wealthy politicians, businessmen and military officials. More specialised services are also offered. At Wat Champuskaek, for instance, just south of Phnom Penh, you can be sprinkled with holy water; it's so popular that at peak times the chief monk has to use a power hose.

If you arrive in Cambodia expecting to find a nation of vegetarians sitting cross-legged and o-m-m-m-ing, you'll be disappointed the first time you open a paper or see a gang of boys whacking a chicken to death with a stick. For many Khmer, Buddhism is not about detaching from the world, but progressing successfully through it. FT

NOTES

1 The guesthouse where I used to work had a spreadsheet for recording expenses – including the daily payment to monks.

2 Paper presented at Siem Reap Conference, Religious Studies in Cambodia: Understanding the Old and Tracing the New, 11 June 2012.

3 *Kop Santepheap Daily*, 27 April 2012.

4 *Phnom Penh Post*, 3 May 2012.

5 Muriel Paskin Carrison: *Cambodian Folk Stories from the Gatiloke*, from a translation by The Venerable Kong Chhean, Turtle Publishing, 1987.

6 *Phnom Penh Post*, 31 Aug 2011.

7 Ian Harris: *Cambodian Buddhism: History and Practice*, Silkworm Books, 2005, p77.

8 Evil spirits were blamed for a mass fainting in a factory in Kampong Speu province in October 2011 and monks were called in to get rid of them. *Phnom Penh Post*, 1 Nov 2011. Monks had been called in to another factory a couple of months earlier, where mass faintings were blamed on evil spirits and "mental illness". *Phnom Penh Post*, 5 Sept 2011; see also **FT284:22**. In 1968, two years before he was deposed, Norodom Sihanouk found a flying squirrel asleep in his room. Flying squirrels being inauspicious, he immediately summoned a group of monks to perform an exorcism. The squirrel's tree was also cut down. Harris, *op. cit.*, p155.

9 Harris, *op. cit.*, p133.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

JEN OGILVIE used to work for *FT*, but ran away to Cambodia to work as a freelance journalist. For updates on how this experiment is progressing, head over to www.jenogi.com.

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Fortean Times is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

From the viewpoint of mainstream science, its function is elegantly stated in a line from Enid Welsford's book on the mediæval fool: "The Fool does not lead a revolt against the Law; he lures us into a region of the spirit where... the writ does not run."

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox.

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KENNETH ANGER ALSO PRACTICES CROWLEYAN MAGICK! DOES HE ACTUALLY HAVE OCCULT POWERS?? SOME THINK SO...

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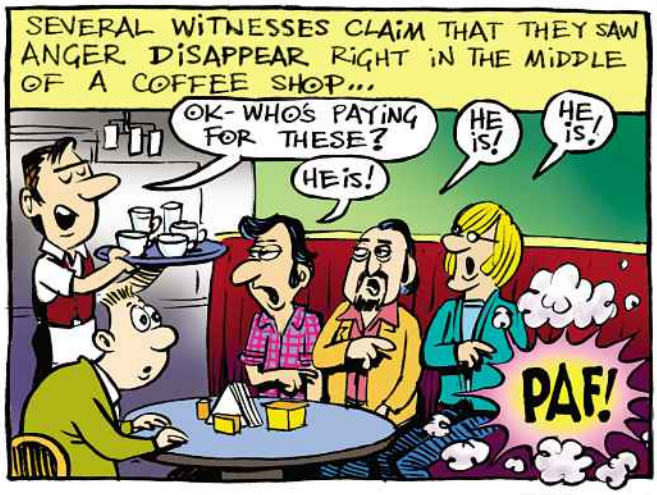
5 HOURS LATER, ANGER WOKE HIS VICTIM UP — THE BORE CONTINUED WITH THE SENTENCE HE HAD BEEN SPEAKING!

SEVERAL WITNESSES CLAIM THAT THEY SAW ANGER DISAPPEAR RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF A COFFEE SHOP...



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...SO WE WOULD LIKE TO EMPHASISE THAT IN OUR VIEW HE IS CHARMING, TALENTED, AND A THOROUGHLY NICE CHAP!

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ON SALE 11 OCTOBER

HUGO PIETTE

TALES FROM THE VAULT

EACH MONTH WE SEND *FORTEAN TIMES* FOUNDER BOB RICKARD DOWN INTO THE DARKEST, COBWEB-RIDDEN DEPTHS OF THE VAULTS OF FORTEAN TOWERS IN SEARCH OF STORIES FROM *FT*'S PAST.

OCTOBER 1982

Ida Sabala of Chicago confessed to police that she had stolen a parrot called Arturo from his owner Robert P Fox, in revenge for him (she alleged) stealing her dog. Ida said she killed Arturo, cooked and fed him to her aged grandmother. The poor bird – who spoke Spanish, English, Italian, and a bit of German – was later found shaken but intact. In a variant of this tale related by Christopher Logue, Ida Rubell (not Sabala) really does feed the parrot – belonging to Robert P Zing (not Fox) – to her grandmother! **FT38:19–20**, **289:27**

From China comes a story so preposterous we hope it's true. Numerous pilgrims to Omei, a sacred Buddhist mountain, complained of being mugged by three old monkeys that stole watches and bags. "Each of the monkeys has a physical defect," noted *China Daily*. "One is hare-lipped; another is one-eyed; and the third has only three fingers on its right hand." **FT43:73**

OCTOBER 1992

From the last days of September into October, comet Swift-Tuttle was visible for the first time in 130 years, although its effect, the spectacular Perseid meteor shower (debris left behind by previous orbits), appears every August. Interesting timing, then, for a number of doomsday cults. Pastor Lee Jang Lim, leader of the Tami Missionary Church of South Korea, predicted that the day of Rapture (being taken up to Heaven) would occur on the 28th. Imagine the disappointment of his faithful when he was arrested for a massive fraud in September. He had pocketed over two million pounds in donations and had £230,000 in US bonds due to mature in 1995. There was a disagreement over the actual date of the Rapture and one believer burned himself to death on the 5th.

Also in South Korea, 500 devotees of the Davera Mission Church spent the night of 9/10th in fervent prayer. Outside their temple, 200 police waited, ready to intervene in case of suicides… but the night passed without incident. In Australia, Jesus was expected to appear in the sky over Sydney on the 29th. Across Australia, adherents of the Mission for the Coming Days readied themselves for bodily ascent into Heaven, led by another Korean pastor, Chang Hun Jo, who was affiliated to the Tami Mission. **FT65:7**, **66:7**

The month ended with BBC1's Hallowe'en broadcast of *Ghostwatch*, Stephen Volk's dramatisation of an investigation into a fictional poltergeist haunting. The BBC received more than 20,000 complaints, making it one of the most notorious of the Beeb's productions, topping even the panic over *Alternative 3*. The filmed section concerned the phenomena inside the house and allowed for some spooky special effects; think of it as an early version of *Paranormal Phenomena* crossed with *The Blair Witch Project*. This was framed by a studio set modelled upon a morning talk show, presided over by Michael Parkinson, (channelling his no-nonsense Yorkshire persona) and his team, including *Red Dwarf*'s star Craig Charles. Most of the complaints accused the BBC of betraying the trust of viewers, lulled by the presenters into believing it was all true. Parents also spoke of children being terrified. (Warnings were given throughout the programme, but most zipped past the viewers' eyes and ears; *and* it was shown after the 9pm watershed.) Defending themselves, the producers stressed that the programme was "conceived, produced and billed as drama", and that they "wanted to create a good ghost story, not a media hoax". Parkinson made matters worse by crowing: "If we scared the pants off people, we've done our job well."

Ten years later (in 2002) *FT* celebrated the show's anniversary with a special memoir and analysis by Volk. He noted the cloud of legends that had evolved from *Ghostwatch*; its influence on filmmakers; the rumours of black market videos going for £50; and that every year since, university professors report students wanting to write their Media Studies dissertation on the affair. **FT67:4**, **38–42**; **166:36–41**

OCTOBER 2002

In mid-October, residents in the south-west corner of Alaska reported sightings of a bird as large as a light aircraft. It was said to be four times the size of a Bald Eagle, have a 14ft (4.3m) wingspan and resemble a pterodactyl. One of the sightings was by bush pilot John Bouker and his passengers from 1,000ft (300m) away. An ornithologist for the US Fish and Wildlife Service in Juneau proposed that it was a Steller's Sea Eagle, a rare visitor from Siberia. Pilot Bouker was adamant: he'd seen thousands of eagles, he said, and this was neither a Bald nor a Steller's eagle, and "an awful lot bigger". We heard no more of that story. **FT166:6**

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